

SARAH
and her
DAUGH-
TER
by
BERTHA PEARL



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SARAH AND HER
DAUGHTER

BY
ALICE PEARL

SARAH AND HER DAUGHTER

NEW YORK
THOMAS BRIDGES

SARAH AND HER DAUGHTER

BY
BERTHA PEARL *Moore*



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THOMAS SELTZER
1920

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Dedicated to
Henrietta Szold and her Sister Adele

BOOK I
SARAH

PART I
ELIAS

SARAH AND HER DAUGHTER

PART I

ELIAS

I

FROM the back door of a front tenement in New York's East Side a little girl came skipping into the contracted square courtyard separating it from the rear tenement. A small mongrel was worrying the end of a rag in her hand, and, for a while, the two played tug-of-war in the offal-littered yard. Presently a boy, somewhat older than the girl, emerged from the rear tenement.

"Hello, Minn!"

"Hello, Abie!"

Abie, the helmet of his cap sitting rakishly over his left ear, his hands in his pockets, walked leisurely to the middle of the yard. Minnie gave Abie a measuring look, like a player in a game awaiting a decisive move from his opponent, then, somewhat self-consciously, went on pretending to tear the rag away from Foxy, who worried it with short, make-believe vicious snarls.

Abie watched the sport.

"Minn," he said.

She held Foxy off. "Wha' do you wan'?"

"You wanna play grocery?"

Minnie looked at Abie shyly.

"*You* wanna?"

"Yeh."

"Aw right."

Minnie skipped to a corner of the yard where she

busied herself with housekeeping details. Once or twice she ordered Foxy to get out of her way, muttering aloud to herself: "Childrens are such a bother in a house when you got a lot a work to do."

From his many pockets Abie assembled marbles to be sold as potatoes, placed one piece of wood see-saw over another for scales, and scraping up some of the plenteous dirt put it aside to be sold as flour, sugar, or salt. When all was ready, he called to Minnie:

"Now you dass come."

Minnie heaved a "mama's" breath, a breath closely related to a sigh. "Here, Foxy!" she called, and locked an imaginary door. Next she hung an imaginary basket on her arm and proceeded on a shopping expedition as Mrs. Mira Cohen, a friend of her mother's.

"Good morning," said the groceryman.

"Good morning," Mrs. Cohen replied tartly. Mrs. Mira Cohen was known to be a crank. "You got sugar?"

"Yeh, fresh sugar. You wan' a pound?" the groceryman inquired.

"No, a paper," replied Mrs. Cohen. A "paper," in the linguistic mysteries of the East Side, differentiates a bag of three and a half pounds from a bag of one pound.

The groceryman proceeded to weigh the sugar. As the pieces of wood were too narrow, the scales proved provokingly incompetent. After several efforts he felt justified in assuming he had weighed a "paper." Not so the thrifty Mrs. Cohen.

"That ain't no paper," said she contemptuously.

"'Tain't? 'Tis!" the groceryman contradicted.

"Uh! 'Tain't!" repeated Mrs. Cohen, making a ges-

ture as if to throw the sugar off the scales. The groceryman laid a hand of protection on his wares. A moment's tension, and Mrs. Cohen said:

"Wha' do *you* know?"

"My dear lady," rejoined the groceryman, maintaining his dignity, "it's a paper." He looked over Mrs. Cohen's shoulder at an imaginary customer. "Wha' do you wan'?" he asked.

Mrs. Cohen had no intention of yielding; she placed her arms akimbo and said in a raised voice, stressing each word:

"That ain't no paper." Suddenly Mrs. Cohen turned into Minnie and added: "Yeh, my papa kept a grocery, not yourn. *I* know."

The groceryman paid no attention to this personal turn.

"My dear lady," he said, "wha' do you wan' I should lose *money* on you? That's a paper."

Minnie turned into cranky Mrs. Cohen again.

"You can paper me from to-day up till to-morrow, that ain't no paper by me."

The groceryman of the neighborhood having the reputation of being "independent," Abie saw fit to tell Mrs. Cohen that if she did not like it, she could lump it. This roused Mrs. Cohen to a corresponding measure of defiance.

"I will!" she announced shrilly, stamping her foot. "And I'll never buy for another penny here 'cause you're a cheat!"

Minnie's acting was so realistic that Abie applied the epithet to himself. Instantly he turned into the normal boy and made as if to spit in her face. Thinking better of it, however, he merely taunted:

"Fights!"

Mrs. Mira Cohen vanished from the yard. In her stead stood an irresolute, impotent little girl with tears welling up in gray, dark-lashed eyes too large for her thin-featured face.

Abie knew that his vengeance could not have been more complete had he actually used the last resort of the infuriated—had he spat in her face. He was glad.

The tears rolled down Minnie's face. She dashed them from her cheeks with the back of her hand and sucked them from her upper lip.

Stooping, she picked up Foxy and left the yard.

"Fights!" It was a cruel wound to a child's pride in her family. Something vaguely told Minnie that in spite of the sordidness of her home life, her mama and her papa were made of finer material than Abie's mama and papa, or Mira Cohen and her husband. "Fights!" had not been a reference to any pugnacious quality in Minnie, but to the relations existing between her father and mother.

Beside Minnie, who was eight, the juvenile end of the Mendel family comprised Jacob aged ten, Ida nearly seven, and the baby, endearingly called Bubbele, aged three. The authors of their beings were two people whose alliance was never formed with heaven's forethought; if it was, there is something terribly wrong with heaven.

Abie's mother was janitress of the twin tenements. When her home duties interfered with her janitor's work, Abie helped her. Lighting the gas in the halls was his regular job. A few days before, while performing this duty, the thing had occurred which provoked the taunt of "Fights."

Abie, making his way up the dark, rickety stairs of the front tenement, stumbled over something on the lowest step of the fourth flight. He struck a match, kindled his lighter, and beheld Minnie Mendel. She was in tears and looked much older than her years.

"Say!" said Abie.

No answer.

"Wot's a madder?"

From the floor above came a woman's voice vulgarly shrill and loud:

"I can't *stand* it any longer!" Abie and Minnie heard distinctly. "I can't stand it *any* longer! The children go hungry and naked, and you hold on to your Sabbath! I cannot stand it any longer."

Minnie lay across the step completely barring Abie's way.

"I gotta light the lights," he said, "get out o' the way."

Minnie moved to one side, and Abie proceeded to the top floor. In the front tenement he worked from up down; in the rear tenement from down up, finishing on the top floor where he lived.

When Abie, on the way back, reached the step just above Minnie, a man's voice sounded, calm but not defiant:

"I cannot work on the Sabbath. You can if you want to."

"Oh-h-h!" shrieked the woman, infuriated impotence in her cry.

Abie was terribly interested. The gas lighter accentuating the darkness at his feet, he did not see that Minnie was again lying crosswise on the step below. He stumbled over her a second time, now with dis-

astrous results. Bump went his head on the railing. The shock and the quick pain gave Abie the blind impulse to visit corporal punishment upon the cause, and he was about to kick Minnie lying at his feet, when he checked himself and burst out instead:

"Fights!"

Minnie cringed and said nothing.

That violent shriek seemed to have concluded the altercation. Abie waited a moment or two, then went on about his business.

Presently the door above opened. Minnie saw her father come slowly, awkwardly, down the stairs. His head was bowed, his eyes were fixed on his feet. Two or three times he muttered as he shook his head:

"She has no shame, she has no shame. The neighbors could have heard her."

Minnie drew to the rear of the hall. Her father passed without seeing her.

On the floor below he was seized with a fit of coughing. Minnie ran to the balustrade. She saw him use his handkerchief, straighten his hat, and walk out.

II

When the Mendels arrived in America from a small village in the Baltic provinces, their nearest of kin met in consultation to decide what the father should do for a living. As the family had come safeguarded by nearly a thousand dollars, it was thought advisable that he go into business for himself, especially as it would also solve the difficulty of the Sabbath observance. Elias Mendel was a pious orthodox Jew. The relatives had, of course, learned to renounce much of their piety

by this time; but they had not forgotten their own spiritual struggle and were tolerant of Elias. "In time he will get *ausgegreent*" (lose the greenness of the new-comer), they said.

The next question was, what business to put Elias into. The decision was a soda-water stand, with a show-case for candies, chewing-gum, cigars and cigarettes. About a month later Elias, the pious Jew, with the thoughtful face of one who has spent long hours in the study of the Law, was standing in a booth in front of a drug store on Pike Street, mixing red syrups and yellow syrups with "sizzling" water to answer the outlandish calls for vanilla, strawberry, ginger, raspberry.

"A language!" Elias Mendel marvelled, and shrugged his shoulders.

The stand did not yield the big revenue predicted. The promoters of the plan accounted for the failure by Elias Mendel's overscrupulous honesty. Moreover, "a stand must be kept open on a Saturday. People who go to another stand on a Saturday, go to it on a Sunday too, and on a Monday, and on a Tuesday." A true deduction.

But Elias Mendel held to his Sabbath.

The next venture was a grocery store on Forsyth Street. Elias gave full measure, and, of course, kept closed on Saturday. So how *could* it pay?

"He is crazy honest," said the relatives in denunciation. "And his Sabbath kills him."

The Mendel capital dwindled to a shadow of its former self; and finally even the shadow faded away. There followed a period of short-lived jobs. In quick succession Elias was a paper-box maker, a bastings

puller, a ladies' shirtwaist sleeve maker. Because he was wholly untrained and was granted the privilege of Sabbath observance, each position yielded him a weekly wage that brought his family closer and closer to the verge of starvation.

Days set in when the children asked for bread and Sarah had none to give.

In the old country Elias, though he had owned a dry-goods store, which had maintained his family amply, had been able to give up a goodly portion of each day to prayer and Talmudic study in the synagogue, as he had had the aid not only of Sarah but also of Sarah's parents, who had migrated with their daughter from Memel at the time of her marriage. Never had he dreamed of such a change. To work a *whole* day and that there should be talk even of violating the Sabbath! It was unheard of. America was a queer country.

Sarah had no such scruples with regard to the Sabbath observance, though she was not wholly irreligious. Early in life she had come under the influence of a "freethinker" lover, a young man who with the assurance of the immature, waived all faith aside with "*Narrishkeit, narrishkeit*" (foolishness)! He had bent her point of view, though not to absolute skepticism, yet to uncertainty, to which, however, as long as she remained in her father's home, she never gave voice. Women of Sarah's generation and bringing up, in normal circumstances, do not pit their opinions against those of their men folk. When they disagree, they bow their heads and say nothing.

Sarah's parents, declaring her marriage with Leopold Pollack would bring them to an early grave, forced her to marry, at seventeen, Elias, pious and uncouth and as

unsuited to her romantic temperament as water to fire.

By degrees she began to realize more and more fully that her life was always to be what it was; she was ever to be the keeper of Elias's home, nothing else, and she began to nurture resentment and bitterness. The longer she drew comparisons the more convinced she became that Elias, for all his piety, was no whit better a man than the freethinker she had been made to give up.

Yet, while her parents, whom she loved and felt consideration for, were with her, she exercised self-control and maintained, on the whole, an agreeable manner. But a discerning person would have observed that she had periods of apparently unwarranted thoughtfulness and often avoided meeting her parents' as well as Elias's eyes when they spoke to her. Then, too, she was irritable with the children on insufficient provocation. But no one gave Sarah any special observation except to ask now and again what in God's name she wanted of the children since they were only children. Sarah would turn away, say nothing, and soon resume her manner of quiet agreeableness.

Sarah's parents died, one following the other quickly. Then came the emigration, which tore her from the surroundings in which she might have continued to live a comparatively serene life, and transferred her to the soil of poverty, in which self-control, like so many other virtues, is doomed to wither.

III

A few days after Minnie's and Abie's encounter in the yard, Mira Cohen came to visit Sarah. Always swift in her movements, she seemed now, as she en-

tered the room, actually to be whipping the air. She was a tall, lean woman, with scanty red hair drawn away from her forehead and ears into a tight knot on the peak of her head.

Something was up. Sarah could read it in her eyes. Mira let herself down on the lounge emphatically and looked Sarah squarely in the eye.

"*Nu, wus macht ihr?*" (How are you?) she began with decision.

Sarah raised her eyebrows and looked away.

Though much alike, the two women were a curious study in contrast. Sarah, too, was tall and thin; there were reddish glints in her straight hair. One could tell at a glance that both women were harassed and embittered. But Sarah's pale, thin lips quivered, while Mira's tight-set jaw seemed to challenge God and man to dare to do worse by her. In Sarah's large gray eyes were timidity and diffidence. Mira's small blue eyes darted hard determination and self-assurance.

Sarah looked to the floor as though seeking inspiration for the right answer to Mira's quite conventional question. "How should one be?" she finally brought out. "If one lives and one walks and one talks, then one is all right! No?" Tears gathered in her eyes, her heart was heavy with its burdens.

It crossed Mira's mind that the woman was a fool. There were plenty of remedies in America to resort to when one had a conscienceless husband. Indeed, that devotion of Elias's to the Sabbath was a fine affectation. The truth was, he was lazy. Accustomed to his "if-I-don't-come-to-day, I'll-come-to-morrow" way in the old country, he seized upon any pretext to live in the same way here. Would *she* stand for such conduct?

Indeed not. Her mind travelled with self-approbation to a scene between herself and *her* husband.

Though Sarah and Mira were friends, Mira had no patience with Sarah's out-of-place refinement, and Sarah innately withdrew from Mira's ever-ready advice and incessant activity. Mira was always discovering a cheaper fish store, a place where one could get coal for next to nothing, a pushcart of "remlets" (remnants), or a dispensary; and she was forever giving advice to all sorts of people about all sorts of things, from how to set dough to when to call in the police.

Mira straightened herself, so that she looked like a red-knobbed stick on Sarah's lounge.

"Nu, God be thanked, I fixed him!" The announcement was what her determined manner had been setting the stage for.

"Fixed him?" asked Sarah shyly, who sensed that Mira was referring to her drinking husband. Though her friend's confidential tone invited questioning, she shrank from being intrusive.

"Yes, I fixed him. Long enough I stood it. But no more. I made up my mind there would have to be an end *before* death. If I waited for God to wake up from His dreams, it would take to my death, so I made my *own* finish." Women of the Ghetto so invariably accept their lot in life as final "*until death*," that Mira felt she was the founder of a new creed.

Through Sarah's heart darted envy. Here was a woman who always found the proper remedy. Why could she not do the same?

"He promised me on his knees he would abstain, and yet after that he came home drunk—that dear husband of mine. I said to myself: 'That settles it; now there

must be an end. Rabbi Sunder's daughter it does not suit to be the wife of a drunkard.' " At the recollection of her aristocratic paternal ancestry, tears of resentment came to Mira's eyes. "Why of all women it should be just *my* luck to have a drunkard for a husband, I don't know." She wiped her eyes and shrugged her bony shoulders. "God forgive me—but He really does not know His business," she averred. A shade of a smile flitted over their faces. After a brief silence Mira went on rehashing her grievances.

"It drowns his worries. Worries! Porries! What worries has he? *Nebich*, he cannot work in the shop. The air chokes him. He wants to live in a house with a grassy yard like at home. No other way suits him." Mira's breath came in excited puffs; beads of perspiration appeared on her long forehead.

Sarah, all impatience to know what remedy this woman, who, like herself, was encumbered with an unmanageable husband, had found, was passionately wishing she would end the prelude and tell the story. Mira, detecting the inquisitive look in her eyes, moved to the edge of the lounge.

"Across the street from the house I live in," she began, leaning over closer to Sarah, "is Essick Market Court——" She waited to see whether Sarah remembered the building; on the way to Mira's home one must pass it. "That's a place for just such women *as* me—and you, too." Seeing that Sarah dropped her eyes, Mira repeated: "Yes, you, too. Why should we fool ourselves? It's between friends. What's the difference if a husband doesn't support because he drinks or because he is in love with the Sabbath? If a husband doesn't support, he doesn't support."

Sarah quivered inwardly. It was a rude touch, which she both resented and welcomed.

"I made him go to the Essick Market Court. I told him if he would not go willingly, I would call in a policeman. He took and he went and he stood——" she punctuated with her forefinger in midair, "like a coward before the judge; and when he heard that he would be arrested if he got drunk once more, he trembled like a frightened little boy." Mira seemed now to have reached the end of the drama in her heart and relaxing as in relief added: "It's now a week and—only no evil eye should befall him—he hasn't been drunk once."

Both women silently regarded each other like seller and buyer when the salesman has exhausted his talking points and waits for the other to make up his mind.

The door opened and Elias entered. Seeing Mira he gave a perfunctory greeting. Mira rose hastily. God in heaven! she had stayed longer than she intended. Elias was at home! It must be late! Hastily she gathered up her belongings. Sarah handed her a parcel which she seemed to have forgotten, but Mira, giving Elias a sharp glance, said to Sarah:

"No, it's for you."

In his shabby dark gray suit, his hair tousled, his beard untrimmed, Elias, dusty and worn, looked an object that has been trampled upon and abused. His manner and figure exuded such fatigue that its heaviness spread like a contagion through the room. Mira correctly concluded that he had been out job-hunting the whole day without success because of the Sabbath. She soliloquized: "A man should be so crazy religious! A woman should allow herself to be so ill-treated!" She had no patience with either of them. If the woman were

only *energetic* and *did* something, took him to the court, for instance, had him frightened once and for all, then they would get somewhere. He would make up his mind that God does not pay wages for piety, that children do not grow like branches of a tree, but must be fed, that a wife is more a man's responsibility than God Himself, that in short, a man must go and do and make.

As Sarah led her irate visitor to the door and out into the hall for the inevitable appendage to a woman's visit—a little more talk—Mira expressed her thoughts.

Sarah listened, becoming more and more impressed with the enormity of the abuse she and her children were suffering at Elias's pious hands. Any expression of regret from him, she felt, even if couched in such mean terms as "dog, devil, I am sorry my piety makes it hard for us," would have satisfied her. But he never so much as said "my poor children;" he thought only of himself and his piety, of his heaven not to be missed later. Sarah's indignation waxed hotter and hotter.

Returning to the room she at once opened Mira's parcel. Bread and meat! Mira's leavings! God's reward for piety!

"Look," she said to Elias, obviously controlling her anger. "If Mira had not brought this, the children would have nothing to eat." Elias made no reply. There was no need to ask whether he had got work. His dejection allowed of no optimism. Sarah stood for a moment irresolute, then drew closer to him. "Tell me," she began as if propounding a mathematical problem, "do you think this can go on *very* much longer? As your wife, do you think I deserve *no* consideration? And the children—don't you *ever* intend to realize that they must

be fed, that children do not grow like branches on a tree?"

Elias rose from his chair. "Don't begin all over again," he pleaded gently, his eyes moist with beseeching.

For one instant Sarah was held by pity; then carried away by anger, she hurled at him:

"I'll fix you, I'll fix you! Let all the neighbors listen to my loud voice, let all the relatives consider us a disgrace. If you will not work to support your children, you are no better than Mira's drunken husband, and I'll drag you to court as she dragged him. I don't care for anything, I'll fix you, I'll fix you!"

Elias was dazed by the volley of words. He had no idea what Sarah was talking about—"drunken"—"court"—"fix." He begged her to control herself. She grew only the more furious. Elias picked up his hat and went out.

IV

For days Mira's words went round and round in Sarah's mind. Each day her soul drew a little nearer to sanctioning the course of conduct Mira had advised. "He deserves it, he deserves it! He deserves *anything*! A man who will let his children starve deserves the worst that can happen to him," she said over and over again to herself.

There were moments, however, when the very fact that she had this weapon to fall back upon lulled her anger to rest. She admitted to herself that Elias, after all, *was* concerned about his children; that he simply had a mistaken sense of loyalty to his God. She would

sigh and her naturally shy spirit would draw away from the profane measure of revenge that she was contemplating. . . . But what *was* she to do? Where was it leading to? They could not live on Mira's leavings of bread and meat! A man who did not support his family for love of his Sabbath was as bad as a drunkard:

Day after day Elias returned the same dusty gray figure, his dragging step in the hall forever announcing failure. At each futile attempt, Sarah's resentment blazed up and dying down left as a residue a more crystallized determination to seek redress. At last, tried to the utmost, she broke away from her timidity and tolerance, and, raising her head high, jumped into the fray of the more sophisticated.

V

One Friday morning, after many rehearsals, Minnie said to her father:

"Papa, mama said you should meet Mira's husband by his house, and he will take you to work by buttonholes in his shop."

Pretending she could market more economically for the Sabbath at an early hour, Sarah had left at eight o'clock. Jacob had gone out at the same time ostensibly for school. A little later Minnie also departed. The last to go was Elias.

At the corner of the street near the courthouse Sarah and Jacob waited for Minnie; then the three waited for Elias. Sarah thought with bitter sarcasm: "He hurries!"

She was as agitated as though she were the victim, not the aggressor. Her heart hammered at her ribs, her temples throbbed, her mouth and lips were dry, her

tongue was pasty. She glanced nervously from one corner of the street to the other, one moment indignant at Elias's delay, the next moment hoping he would not come. Her reason for seeking refuge in the Essex Market Court was forgotten. She was conscious only of something strange to be accomplished, of a pounding heart, and a brain throbbing and muddled.

Minnie, the first to spy Elias approaching at a slow, even gait, his eyes lowered, whispered:

"Uh, ma, there's pa!"

Sarah gathered her shawl nervously about her and looked around.

Self-control is characteristic of Talmud-trained Jews. Though Elias was astonished to see his wife and his two children, he betrayed no emotion. He drew toward them at the same even, slow pace. He suspected there was something wrong but he asked quite calmly:

"What is the matter?"

Without preliminaries, to all appearance aggressive, in reality almost collapsing from agitation, Sarah told her husband "it would have to end." Once for all it would have to be settled who was right, he or she, whether the children ought or ought not to starve. She would "make a scene to bring all the people together" if he did not go to court with her and learn that a man who did not support his family because of piety was no better than a drunkard.

Elias listened dumfounded. He recalled the words, "court," "drunken," "fix," to which he had attached no actual significance. Could he be hearing aright? Was the woman in front of him his wife? Were the two children his children? He found nothing to say in reply. Finally he gathered his wits together.

"You must be crazy. It cannot be otherwise." He shrugged his shoulders as if to say that even if Sarah were insane, such conduct was incomprehensible. Suddenly the face of a yellow cat, which had been the family pet in Russia, danced irritatingly before his eyes. He dropped his lids to blot out the image. Then came a fleeting vision of Minnie as a baby. He glanced at the child. She, glimpsing his look, moved closer to her mother, raising her thumb to her mouth. An exquisite pain pierced Elias's father-heart.

In just a moment, Elias's beard became two beards to Sarah, then three beards, and one again, and his person very clear. Sarah's resolution gained strength in that moment. "Once for all!" she said emphatically. Her loud voice intimidated them all. Simultaneously and without definite purpose they proceeded slowly forward.

"Can it be that this is Sarah?" Elias thought. In some unaccountable way a tender feeling for his wife entered his heart. He stepped nearer and took her by the elbow. "Come, my wife, this is for people's laughter" (*far leitische Gelechter*). He spoke gently and tried to lead her away. This only irritated Sarah more. "You dare!" she shouted. Elias looked timidly about to see if anyone had heard. A scene on the street was above all to be avoided. They continued slowly to approach the courthouse.

When they reached the door, each waited for the other to lead the way. Presently an officer appeared and gruffly ordered them to "move on." Frightened, they proceeded as one person to enter.

Returning from her marketing, Abie's mother, who was not Christianly disposed toward Sarah, just then passed the courthouse. She saw the Mendels disap-

pearing through the doorway. She stopped short in astonishment. "That they *fight*," she thought, "who does not *know* that! But to go to *court*!" She shrugged her shoulders and walked on. "A coarse woman, that Mrs. Mendel!" she murmured to herself. "But as long as she speaks *German*! every sin of hers is nullified. *Yiddish past ihr nit*." (Yiddish is not good enough for her).

A long wait on shabby benches in a musty room—a period of unreality to them all—then Sarah and the two children were hustled to one side of a platform; Elias was placed on the other side, an interpreter between.

Sarah looked nervously about. For an instant she permitted her eyes to rest on Elias; he looked ghastly. A sharp pain smote her heart. "Woe is me!" she cried inaudibly. Such is that type of rebel, they can continue to prosecute by tongue or deed apparently without mercy, while they are tortured by the voice of conscience.

It was indeed a tragic Mendel group which faced the Law that morning:

Sarah, her heart torn.

Elias, sorrowful and ashamed.

Minnie, alarmed and unsteady on her feet.

Jacob, shy, his cap pulled down over his tear-filled eyes.

The first to be called was Elias. Sarah, whose shaking knees almost gave way, looked about the room. She observed a woman with disheveled hair, who sat with her mouth wide open. Bringing her unsteady hand up to her own hair she adjusted a few loose strands. Elias stammered out his name with a swift look at his wife. A wave of intense bitterness surged through

his being, and hot tears came to his eyes. At the same moment Sarah's heart again cried: "Woe is me!" Until her turn came, she heard not another word.

"What is your name?"

Sarah raised her chest under her shawl and drew the shawl closer about her thin shoulders. Suddenly the room seemed to be in utter darkness. She blinked and steadied herself against the railing. Then composing herself, she answered huskily: "Sarah Mendel." Her name was entered in the formidable-looking book. She was now called upon to state her "case."

She ran the back of her hand over her neck, and made an effort to say something, but her voice seemed gone. She looked down at the floor then cleared her throat. The interpreter told her to speak Yiddish, he would explain to the judge. Hearing the word "judge," Sarah looked up at that impressive personage and smiled stupidly. The court grew impatient. The interpreter told her to "hurry." Thus recalled to action, Sarah nervously put her hand to her wrist, slowly pushed up her sleeve and exposed bruises caused by the stove door falling shut on her arm.

"Does he hit you?" the interpreter inquired. Sarah nodded her head.

"He don' give us nothin' to eat," little Minnie shyly repeated the sentence her mother had rehearsed with her, her thumb again in her mouth, her head lowered, her eyes raised to the judge.

There followed some writing and an authoritative command:

"Ten days."

Sarah, dazed, stupefied, limp, passed her hand over her eyes. On removing it she saw her husband in the

grasp of two uniformed men. She shrieked like a mad woman. Arrested! Ten days! Elias arrested! No, that was not what she had intended. She had only wished him frightened, as Mira's husband had been—then he would work on the Sabbath.

Her lamentations broke on unattending ears. The law was not to be trifled with.

Another "case" was being tried. With little ceremony Sarah and her children were dumped outdoors where the sun shone unconcernedly. Sarah wrung her hands and moaned, "Woe is me! Woe is me!" the two children wailing with her.

VI

Mrs. Ratkin said to her husband:

"That Mendel woman—I should live so and be well—she has sent her husband 'over the water.'* When I came home from Sabbath marketing I saw her and her husband and Jakie and Minnie going into Essick Market Court. That she and her husband *fight*—who does not know that? But to go to *court*, and to get her husband arrested! That is already unsuited to Jewish people." Mrs. Ratkin served her husband with her early morning thoughts. "A coarse woman, that Mrs. Mendel. But as long as she speaks *German*. *Yiddish past ihr nit*. And such a one gets her husband arrested! Does that woman deserve to live?" Though her husband was listening quite attentively, open-mouthed like a child afflicted with adenoids, she spoke as if he were an opponent to be argued into her way of thinking.

* Sing-Sing.

Abie, too, was an attentive listener. The moment his mother, engrossed in her narrative, became aware of this fact, she pounced upon him.

"Why did you listen?" Then, realizing that her question was foolish, she had recourse to exhortation. "For God's sake, obey your mother for once and do not tell anyone what I told papa." She conceived the notion that if Sarah knew she knew, Sarah would tell the landlord and she would lose her janitorship. Those whom life hounds see trouble lurking in the remotest corners. Poor Sarah would never have dreamed of approaching the landlord. The landlord indeed! An imposing personage, big-bellied and solemn, of whom Sarah and the other tenants stood immensely in awe. He never greeted them, nor so much as took notice of their existence except to come to their doors once a month, solemn as the occasion itself, and demand the rent.

Eleven days later when Abie was sent by his mother on his gas-lighting job, he struck. The instrument which his father (of a mechanical turn, though pursuing chiefly the trade of rag-picker) had devised for turning the cock of the gas-jet had not been working properly for the past few days, and Abie had been compelled, as he had been before his father's invention, to lug a chair along. He had given his mother fair warning, but she had not been able to prevail upon her husband to shake off his tiredness long enough to fix the tin tube now too large for the candle.

"Go, Abie, go. It's dark already," pleaded his mother.

"I won't," said Abie again. "The candle comes all the time out."

Mrs. Ratkin compressed the tin tube and urged him to try now. At the door the candle fell out. His mother, angered, grabbed the lighter impatiently from his hand, inserted the candle with vehemence and proceeded with Abie. She was resolved to show him that all instruments work well always, if one only applies oneself diligently enough; if one is not a lazy loafer, in short.

In the lowest hall of the front tenement, she encountered Sarah, who started, turned back abruptly as though she had forgotten something, and then faced round again and stammered out a greeting.

"What are you so excited about?" asked Mrs. Ratkin, who knew Elias had returned that afternoon. When she had seen him from the yard, she had looked twice, thrice, to be certain her eyes did not deceive her.

Sarah gave a shy, self-conscious smile.

"My husband—came back from Brooklyn to-day." She colored deeply. "He went because he was sick." She made a hasty move toward the stairs. Mounting a few steps, she added: "I just went out to buy him some supper."

"Upon my word," Mrs. Ratkin confided to her husband in the evening, "that woman is a liar to her bones! She tells me her husband was sick in Brooklyn. Sick! One says nothing then. Why was it necessary for her to tell a lie?" She turned to Abie, dread of contamination entering her heart. "Better, my son, spend your time helping your mother than playing round with that Minnie girl. A homely one—fui!" She turned to her

husband again. "Who knows—children—they grow up before one realizes it. God forbid!"

Jewish parents always provide careers for their children up to and including matrimony, never discouraged in the face of Fate's perpetual contrariness.

"S' a madder, ma?" asked Abie. "Wuz Mr. Mendel arrested? I ain' gonna tell." He placed his hand over his heart in religious pledge of holiday honor. "Tell me," he urged.

"Go, go!" said Mrs. Ratkin to quash his curiosity. Then deeming further precaution necessary she added: "I can, God forbid, lose the place here if that woman begins to tell people or the landlord that I gossip. She is such a liar. Who knows what she would not say if one word got to her! You hear!" she now shouted at Abie, "you should never dare to say a word."

Abie acknowledged that the warning had reached his ears. However, he had no intention of giving up Minnie as a playfellow or a quarrelfellow. In fact, a very different chain of thoughts was set going in his mind. These eventually linked themselves with an event of grave importance to the Ratkin family.

VII

Had Elias Mendel been released immediately upon his wife's pleading, he would undoubtedly have been welcomed back by her as one who has been restored to life from the dead; and temporarily all his sins would have been forgotten. But only temporarily. His religious fanaticism would doubtless soon again have aroused Sarah's hostility and again there would have

set in the same ugly struggle. As it was, the ten days gave each a chance to reflect upon the tragic reality of their sordid relationship.

The period of reflection sobered Sarah, who tortured herself with dire speculations as to where and under what terrible circumstances the law was keeping her husband in confinement. She grew to hate herself for the enormous breach of decency she had perpetrated. Now and then she found solace in disclaiming responsibility for the outcome since it had been so entirely different from her intentions, but the solace would not last long. "He was arrested just the same," she would charge herself, "like any common peasant at home." Elias would be justified in hating her the remainder of his days. When she remembered his decent Talmudic friends "at home" and wondered what they would think of her conduct, she felt a sinking of her heart. As for her parents, she was sure they would "turn in their graves." . . . Like a scientist studying cause and effect she consciously now, for the first time, thought over their life together and saw her disloyalty. "I married him; I must stand his idiosyncrasies as I would stand a disease. To cut up capers in public at this day—with four children—that is indeed *leitische Gelechter*." She felt herself drawn back as by a firm hand to her old, decent self; and rational plans for solving their difficulties came to her. Jacob could sell papers, Minnie could help him, she herself could peddle candles, stationery—do something.

She gave Jacob five cents immediately to invest in ten papers, and he and Minnie sold them at a profit of five cents.

Elias, in his prison cell, little divining Sarah's change of heart, came to the conclusion that she was capable of lying, was vindictive, and disliked him far more than he had ever imagined. She was an outrageous apostate. There was but one decent thing to do, divorce her. The children? Ah, the children! At this point Elias always sighed and got no further. It was, however, with the firm intention of approaching his wife as a man who will have nothing more to do with her that he turned his steps homeward the day of his release.

It was late in the afternoon when he reached home. A melancholy twilight and quiet filled the room. None of the children were at home. On the bed in a dark air-tight bedroom—a denial of our civilization—lay Foxy, the dog, unconcernedly asleep. Sarah was sitting at one of the two windows with "*leitische Gelechter, leitische Gelechter!*" running through her tired mind, and every now and then a sigh of dull resignation escaping from her. She was not expecting her husband.

When the door opened she turned her head, thinking it was one of the children. At sight of Elias her heart bounded. She made a successful effort to hide her emotion. Nothing but the flutter of her eyelids could have revealed her agitation even to the keenest observer. Though her impulse was to rise, she remained seated. Her husband greeted her while he still held the door in his hand. Sarah answered perfunctorily, turning her head quickly to look out of the window. Elias stepped into the room. He coughed, removed his hat, and wiping the perspiration from his forehead, seated himself on the lounge. He coughed again. Then, examining his fingernails, he asked for the children.

Sarah's heart was going nervously. She moved un-

easily on her chair. To cover her tremulousness she put a note of impatience into her answer, "They are playing on the street." She continued to look through the window.

To her husband, in his present frame of mind, her tone suggested: "Why do you not ask whether they are hungry?" Poor Sarah! Somehow she now felt she must conceal her regret. Elias consequently reflected: "The sooner we are divorced the better for all of us, then I will go back 'home.'" He sighed. Sarah impulsively turned eyes of concern upon him. Just then there was a commotion in the hall. Bursting open the door, Ida and Bubbele laughing merrily fell over each other into the room. Upon seeing their father, they instantly disentangled themselves and rushed at him, enthusiastically shouting: "Papa, papa!" Never before had their father paid so long a visit to their uncle in Brooklyn.

Sarah rose from her seat, stood a moment irresolute, then moved toward the stove, where filling the tea kettle gave her an excuse for standing with her back to the group. Another moment's thought, and she decided to go downstairs. She went back to her chair by the window to get her shawl, which had fallen to the floor, and put it about her shoulders.

"Where you gone, mama?" Bubbele piped, staying the movement of her little hand to her father's beard. Elias had taken both children on his knees.

Sarah avoided looking at the group. Inventing the need for some groceries, she said impatiently that she was going out. At that moment the door opened. It was Minnie. Instantly seeing her father she stopped short on the threshold, undecided whether to enter or turn back. Elias looked at her, his head half raised.

"Nu, daughter?" he said, rising as he seated Ida and Bubbele on the lounge.

Minnie looked at her mother, whose eyes, she saw were moist. Quickly laying her head against the hand holding the knob, she burst into tears. Sarah brushed past the child and out, banging the door. Minnie stood weeping in the middle of the room. Elias called to her again. She flew to him and cried in abandonment: "Oo, papa! Oo, papa!" as she nestled her small body against the man's bony frame. Elias clumsily stroked her hair. "Be still, my child," he urged gently, "be still." By degrees Minnie's outburst subsided.

While Elias was still pacifying her, Jacob entered. Seeing his father he quickly moved into the bedroom, where he threw his cap on a chair and stirred about as if attending to things. Then he sat down upon the bed, on which Foxy still lay asleep. Jacob wondered hastily about his father and where his mother was. That his father should be petting Minnie astonished him. He wished his mother would come back. He was anxious for an explanation. . . . In the meantime he stroked Foxy's fur. Several times the dog moved uncomfortably under the hand; finally he awoke, and shaking himself as does a swimmer to throw off the wet, sniffed at Jacob investigatively. In a moment he became aware of Elias's presence, and with one excited move bounded into the other room and licked and wagged Elias a boisterous welcome. Tears came to Elias Mendel's eyes.

Foxy gone, Jacob began twirling his cap, dropped it again, and sat with clasped knees contemplating the ceiling. Elias, though he glanced stealthily into the bedroom, did not call to his son, somehow, from Jacob, expecting unsolicited action.

Sarah on the street bethought herself that Elias, as well as the children, would really be hungry and converted her fictitious errand into a real one, buying a can of salmon, a loaf of bread and some onions on trust. It was returning that she met Mrs. Ratkin and Abie.

As she reentered the room, jealousy shot through her heart at the sight of Minnie in her father's arms. "Small as she is," she thought, "so false—first for me and now for him." Poor Sarah! Minnie's innocent demonstrativeness toward her father, she construed as a reprimand to herself. Lowering her head, she began undoing the packages. Becoming conscious of Jacob's presence, she called to him.

Jacob had risen from the bed on hearing his mother enter, but at her summons, though ready to respond, he pretended he had to pick things up from the floor. The truth was, he hated to face his father. Finally, however, he lounged in, looking steadily toward his mother. Sarah asked how many papers he had sold that day. "Sold them all," he answered fumbling in his pockets for the afternoon's yield. Elias, in quick comprehension, smiled as he watched his son hand ten pennies to Sarah. Though the sight saddened him, he made an attempt at jocularly and naturalness.

"You have become a business man in a week, my son?"

Jacob gave his father an impulsive glance and smiled. Ida and Bubbele, observing from their mother's profile that she, too, was smiling, burst into laughter. The tension was temporarily relieved. Yet throughout the meal there was a feeling of constraint upon all except the two youngest children, who kept on laughing and chattering. Minnie's little body often heaved with short

sob-sighs—the kind that come after much crying. She cast covert glances now at her father, now at her mother. Elias and Sarah exchanged occasional remarks, always avoiding each other's eyes. Jacob ate his share of the meal with stubbornly lowered head. He reflected chiefly about Minnie. "First she goes and says to the judge, and then she cries!" He held his sister in contempt.

The meal was soon over. Bubbele asked to be put on the lounge where she soon fell asleep. The three other children, first Jacob, then Minnie and Ida went to play on the street. East Side children have no regular hours for sleep.

When the door closed on their noisy exit, Sarah rose to clear away the few plates. Service with the Mendels was a simple affair, each helping himself from a common dish. Elias seated himself at the window and looked into the yard. He wiped the perspiration from his face and contemplated his handkerchief. He cleared his throat, rose from his chair, then sat down again as if to settle himself more comfortably, though really in an effort to overcome his nervousness.

Sarah, with her back turned, kept up the appearance of being busied with the dishes. Her hands were trembling too greatly for work. Somehow she was sure that her husband meant to suggest a plan that would clash with hers.

"Sarah," Elias, clearing his throat, finally called to her.

Sarah pretended not to hear above the running of the water.

Elias called again, this time a little louder. The room turned dark to Sarah, her knees shook, she held on to the side of the sink. When Elias called to her a third time, she could no longer evade him. She felt

herself grow limp and faint, and turned not to face him, but to seek a chair, and Elias, who was not looking at her, took it for granted that she had seated herself preparatory to a discussion. Sarah passed her hand over her eyes. Elias examined his fingernails, then began clumsily and not at all as he had intended:

“Sarah, what are we to do?”

She made no reply. Elias repeated the question.

Hardly conscious of what she was saying, Sarah answered slowly, as though she were thinking deeply, as though her suggestions were the inspiration of the moment (such are the masquerades of nervousness).

“Jacob will keep on selling papers—I will get something to do to help along—God will help.”

There was a moment's pause; each became aware that the other had spoken. Elias wondered if he had heard aright. He asked Sarah what she had said. Automatically she repeated:

“Jacob will keep on selling papers—I will get something to do to help along—God will help.”

They looked at each other. Elias saw Sarah's deathly pallor and was aghast. He attempted to rise from his seat. Neither spoke for a moment. Then Elias, sinking back in his chair, put his head in the cup of his palms and wept like a child. Sarah raised a corner of her soiled apron to her eyes, and she, too, wept.

VIII

Elias remained without work; for the arrest neither cured him of his piety nor taught him a trade. His daily plodding rounds in search of a job only brought him home exhausted and heavier hearted.

It was a period of great trial to both Elias and Sarah, whose reconciliation was followed by a sickening self-consciousness inevitable with sensitive people. Gray hairs appeared in Elias's dark beard, darker rings encircled his eyes. Of the two, he made the greater attempt to bridge over the awkwardness. While Sarah went about doing the housework, he would relate incidents of the day and talk of this thing or that, and often read aloud snatches of news from the daily paper. If anything he said required an answer, Sarah would respond with an effort at naturalness and her old-time agreeableness. Generally she would avoid looking at him, and sometimes, when he addressed her suddenly, she would start nervously and reply with irritability. Instantly, however, she would check herself and cover her embarrassment by quickly finding something to do.

There were days when Elias returning from his expeditions complained of feeling ill. "Sick!" Sarah would think sarcastically and resentfully, against the better self which struggled for existence. *She* had a constant pain in her side, yet *she* said nothing. Never before had Elias complained, and Sarah knew he would not complain now without good cause; but want is a wind that blows justice back to heaven.

One evening Elias returned home jubilant. He had found work in a cigarette factory; the boss was an orthodox Jew who had not even raised the Sabbath question, and had actually of his own accord offered to pay Elias his dream of a maximum salary—eight dollars a week.

Elias told of this good fortune with boyish enthusiasm. The rings under his eyes seemed to turn a shade darker from his great joy. Sarah was glad, yet when

Elias in his high spirits attempted to kiss her, she impetuously pushed him away and turned her back. Elias flushed.

Sarah went to the sink and began preparing the supper—a feast of bread and sausages taken on trust from the delicatessen proprietor, whose patience in the matter of extending credit had been less tried in these days than that of the grocer and butcher. The man had given her the eatables with marked kindness, and Sarah groping her way up the dark tenement stairs had shed tears because of his courtesy.

Elias reseated himself on the lounge. Several times he told Ida and Bubbele, who were playing on the floor, not to make so much noise. As soon as Sarah left the sink, he rose to wash himself. Sarah, anticipating his requirements, rummaged in a box in the bedroom for a towel and brought it to him. He took it and thanked her. They avoided each other's eyes.

As Sarah began the simple setting of the table, Minnie came in.

"Sh'll I help you, ma?" she asked promptly.

"No, your face is dirty. Wash your face and comb your hair," Sarah said in a somewhat irritated tone, for, though she refused the help, she resented having to do all the work herself.

Soon the family was ready for the meal. Elias told Jacob, who sat in a corner reading, to put his book down and come to the table. Sarah was the last to seat herself. She had first to wash and comb Bubbele.

During the meal, Minnie gave Sarah a message from Mira Cohen, whom she had met on the street.

"She's gonna see you to-night," the child told her mother.

"To-night, here?" Elias asked. He did not like Mira.

"Did she say she is coming here or that I should go to her?" inquired Sarah, who inferred that the message had something to do with Mira's promise to give her the address of a place where she could apply for work.

"Yeh—no—I mean she is coming here," answered Minnie, passing the cuff of her sleeve across her nose. The father felt called upon to mend his daughter's ways.

"Yeh—no——" he mimicked, intending to add that a young woman of eight should know that a corner of a towel and not the cuff of a sleeve is used for wiping noses. A laugh from Bubbele diverted him. His mimicking had struck her as a huge joke. She began mimicking too. Ida took up the refrain, and soon both children were crying "Yeh—no——" and laughing so infectiously that the others were compelled to join in the fun. Sarah, however, did not enter into the spirit of gaiety. "See, children, stop," she coaxed.

"Let the children have their fun," begged Elias. However, the young ones settled quietly down to eating again. Yet the bit of merriment had cleared the atmosphere of the former constraint. Elias felt he might again talk about his new work. For the present, he explained, he would have to do various small tasks, such as sweeping the place, cleaning the tables, running out for lunches for the employees. The boss, he said, promised to advance him if he proved himself capable—even to the place of foreman. Elias accounted for the boss's generosity by the fact that they were compatriots, although the boss had left the "other side" many years earlier. "He is an unusually nice man," Elias remarked in conclusion.

Sarah, interested, listened attentively, for the first time free of agonizing self-consciousness.

Supper was soon over. Jacob was the first to rise. When Elias questioned him, he said he intended to go and change a book at the library.

"Take me along," pleaded Minnie, as her brother picked up his book and cap.

"No," said Elias somewhat authoritatively, "you stay at home and help your mother. Time enough when you get older to go to libraries."

Minnie stuck her thumb in her mouth and looked over quickly at her mother. "Mama, sh'll I help?"

"No, go," Sarah said, resentment, however, flashing up in her heart again. She was tired, and the task of washing the dishes, few as they were, and tidying the room loomed up as gigantic.

"No, Minnele, you help your mother," Elias insisted.

Though Minnie was willing, Sarah sent her off. The children went out together, Jacob grumbling: "That one always has to run along like a little worm. Makes me sick."

The incident created a slight tension between Sarah and Elias as if something had gone wrong between them. When he rose to help, she turned on him with impulsive impatience.

"Go sit down. So long——" she broke off and turned away quickly. It had been on her lips to say: "So long you never thought of helping and now suddenly you do."

Elias, divining the unspoken, became embarrassed; the color left his face. The occasional underlying irritation in Sarah's manner made him more miserable than had her former full-worded outbursts. He felt the

struggle beneath it. Elias was in love with the Sarah he had married, and when she in the least resembled that old self, he loved her still.

Without comment he walked with bowed head to the lounge, and called Ida and Bubbele, who came running. Stretching himself out at full length, he perched Bubbele on his body and told Ida to be seated on the least dilapidated spot on the lounge; some parts of the Mendel lounge could stand very little strain and could give its burden very great discomfort.

"Ah, pa, tell us a story," Ida begged.

"Yeh," Bubbele chimed in, pulling her father's beard.

"Don' pull papa's beard," Ida chided Bubbele.

Elias told of the coming of the Messiah. Though the children had heard the story countless times before, they listened again with the keenest interest. When the point of the narrative was reached that promised the coming of the Messiah, Ida questioned wonderingly, as she always did: "And will he come on a *great big* mountain and blow a horn, and will all the dead peoples wake up and walk like us?" "Yes," Elias promised. Ida's face expressed incredulity, and Bubbele, who got her cue from Ida, put on a similar expression.

Elias looked over at Sarah standing at the sink. She was thinking: "How people, grown up like Elias, can believe all that, I do not understand. God forgive me if I sin."

Here, without the preliminary of knocking, Mira entered, wiping her face, panting for breath, complaining, simultaneously, of the four flights of stairs, and seating herself.

"Nu, how are you?" she began with her customary

salutation, addressing Sarah. Sarah stole a glance at Elias.

"How I am? I am," she said with a fatalistic gesture characteristic of her race—a resigned lift of the brow and a slight sidewise ducking of the head.

Mira's look implied: "That does not tell me much." So Sarah added quietly: "How should one be? *Alive*. What else is necessary?" She placed a dish on the shelf above the sink and picked up the third and last dish still to be dried. Elias, sitting up on the lounge, looked at the two women.

"That's a truthful truth," Mira vouchsafed in agreement. There was general repressed smiling.

Elias, in a talkative mood, told Mira of his day's success. Mira offered congratulations, which, while sincere, were also sarcastic. "By cigarettes," she said, "one can work one's self up without limit," and then told of a man she knew who now had a cigarette factory of his own, though he had begun just as low as Elias. In fact, so well was he doing that he had no eyes and no use for acquaintances of less prosperous days. Sarah and Elias listened attentively, their hearts fanned by a new hope as is a dying fire by a mild breeze. Timidly, Elias raised his eyes and looked at Sarah, who at last had seated herself. There was silence for a moment or two, the quiet dolefully emphasized by the ticking of a one-legged clock which lay on its side on the wooden shelf over the sink.

Bubbele yawned sleepily. "Put her to bed," Sarah asked gently of Elias. He was touched. Lifting the child from the floor, he kissed her tenderly, and placed her on the bed in the one other room of their home. The next moment Ida also was yawning. "Go to bed, too, childie," he said. She rose and went. Elias picked

up his coat. Sarah glanced at him inquiringly. "I'm going down to buy cigarettes," he explained.

"Soon you will not need to buy cigarettes," Mira said jocosely, "you will have a place of your own." Sarah fumbled with her apron strings. Elias, embarrassed, said good night quietly and went out.

Mira turned eagerly to Sarah. "You see, when he tried, he found," she said.

"He tried before, too," Sarah replied with impulsive irritation, and immediately averted her eyes in annoyance that she had betrayed herself. The truth was, secretly Sarah bore Mira a grudge, as if Mira were to blame that the Law had been less stringent with *her* husband than with Sarah's.

In theory Mira was averse to an outsider's interference, however well meant, between man and wife, especially if either were inclined to resent it. So she said no more on the subject, though Sarah, she thought, might at least be grateful to her for the good influence the arrest had had upon Elias, since otherwise he would doubtless still be an idler. Tactfully she veered to the purpose of her visit. She supposed, she said, Sarah would not need work now. Sarah hastily assured her to the contrary, for eight dollars a week was scarcely enough to maintain six people; and besides there were debts at the butcher's and the grocer's "over her head;" also the children needed shoes. Mira wisely remarked that the poor man's blessing was the fact that he had feet to boot. They both smiled. Mira then gave Sarah the promised address. It was the People's Charities on Mustend Street.

"Charities?" Sarah inquired timidly, with a nervous jerk of her left shoulder. She was alarmed; charity did not gibe with her idea of respectability.

"It is not like asking for money. It is only work you want. Do not be foolish." The issue not being husbands, Mira could, with impunity, be her compelling self.

Sarah lowered her head. She was always helpless when Mira waxed certain. The subject was dismissed. They talked of other things. When, at ten o'clock, Mira rose to go, Sarah accompanied her to the door, where she plucked up the courage to ask:

"Maybe you can go with me?"

"To the Charities?"

Sarah nodded affirmatively.

"Sure, sure."

They agreed to leave Mira's house at ten the next morning. Out of gratitude Sarah momentarily was convinced that Mira had meant well when she had suggested the Essex Market Court as a remedial measure in the case of Elias and that the outcome had been due to her *own* black luck.

Elias, on his return, found Sarah combing her hair. He was in good spirits. "You have pretty hair, Sarah," he said smiling kindly.

Sarah turned her back. She did not like compliments from Elias, and was glad of Minnie's and Jacob's entrance. Jacob had taken two books out of the library, one of which Minnie was carrying, proud as a peacock. Elias interrupted the child in her stream of prattle to remind her of her nightly task;—to bring the two cots in from the outside hall and set them up in the room-of-all-affairs. One was for Jacob, the other for Sarah and Minnie. The bed in the bedroom was occupied by Elias and the two younger children. While Minnie went about her work, Elias undressed Bubbele and Ida,

and Sarah removed bedding from the bed for the cots. When the cots were set up, Minnie helped Sarah distribute the bedding.

"To-morrow when you come from school," the mother whispered as together they spread a sheet, "step into the grocery store and bring a bottle of kerosene." She sighed heavily. Time and again she had tried to exterminate the bedbugs and the roaches.

"Uh, yeh, ma, Jacob scratched hisself the whole day," Minnie piped alertly and appealed to Jacob for corroboration. "Ain' it?"

"What?"

"That you was ate up by the bedbugs."

Jacob was provoked with her. She had invalidated his greater maturity by her juvenile presence beside him in the library.

"All the time she tells—I never saw such a—such a——" His stammering made Minnie and even Sarah laugh.

Elias, already in bed beside Ida and Bubbele, called out that it was late, and as he would have to get up early in the morning, would they quiet down immediately. Sarah turned the gas low and whispered to the children to be still. In the dark the three undressed and crawled into their humble beds.

Minnie was the first to fall asleep. Then Jacob. Sarah lay thinking of her tasks of the morrow—the Charities—the bed cleaning——

Then she, too, fell asleep.

Late in the night Sarah awoke. Almost at the same moment Jacob also awoke. He whispered in a wail: "Uh, mama, it *scratches* me so!"

Sarah sat up in her cot.

"What shall I do—what shall I do!" she moaned,

wringing her hands. Then she checked herself. She must not disturb Minnie. "Go to sleep, sonnie," she coaxed, "go to sleep. To-morrow I will clean again. Go to sleep." As if to inspire the boy to sleep she herself lay down. Jacob followed her example. When all was quiet, Elias turned restlessly in bed once, twice—but not again.

"I clean and I clean," Sarah wailed to herself. "The place is rotten—the very wood is rotten——"

Meanwhile Jacob was taken with a large idea. He knew his mother would not refuse him anything at this hour of the night when she was anxious for quiet above everything else. He whispered, as if taking up the broken thread of a conversation:

"So will you give me a quarter to-morrow for papers, mama? I kin sell more—like the other boys."

Sarah smiled. Her son's shrewdness did not escape her. He had petitioned for the same amount of confidence in his salesman's ability in the daytime, under ordinary circumstances, and she had refused to give it. The boy's assumption was correct; she could not argue with him now.

"All right," she said.

"Remember, you promised."

"All right. Go to sleep."

Jacob turned on his side; though he closed his eyes, he did not fall asleep until dawn. Sarah slept not at all.

IX

In the morning Elias said to Sarah:

"Last night, Sarah, I was greatly bothered. Kerosene——"

Sarah cut him short.

"I have spilled kerosene without measure; it does not help. Warm nights like last night nothing helps. The place is rotten, the wood, the floor. The woman next door, Mrs. Cohen upstairs, everybody has the same trouble." Realizing, to her mortification, that she had displayed temper, she lowered her head and continued more quietly: "Yesterday I found white worms, a whole swarm of them under the sink."

Her evident distress went to Elias's heart. He was sorry he had spoken. He turned to prepare for his morning prayers.

Sarah roused Minnie and Jacob. The cots had to be removed that there might be passing room. Jacob rose reluctantly; he seemed only just to have fallen asleep. With Minnie helping, Sarah carried the bedding into the other room. Minnie then dragged the cots out to the hall. Jacob, as always, concerned himself only with his own person. The accepted position of boys in Jewish homes is that of Lords of the Domain.

Minnie dressed hurriedly. Her next duty was to go to the grocery store for breakfast rolls. She needed no instructions as to the kind or quantity to procure. Each of the children ate one cruller for breakfast, Elias two flat buns with grated onions embedded in the top, Sarah a plain water roll. The sum to be expended was five cents.

Sarah, meanwhile, placed a pot of water on the gas stove and threw in a handful of chicory. Rolls and "coffee" had been the family's morning repast for over two years, with a deviation to nothing at all in harder times.

As Sarah turned from the stove to pick up the things strewn about the room, her eyes fell on Jacob. His

sallowness smote her heart. "He must have been eaten up," she wailed inwardly. Why was such terrible luck coming to her innocent children!

Minnie, having raced up the stairs, burst into the room all out of breath.

"Look, look, how she runs!" Sarah cried to Elias; then to Minnie: "Why do you always run?" and to herself, moaning: "How thin and pale she, too, looks! They are all coming to nothing." She turned away to hide her tears.

Minnie, who took Sarah's lament for a scolding, defended herself.

"Papa said he must be in the shop by seven."

Elias, engaged in the part of the morning prayer at which speech is forbidden, shook his head to deny that he had meant the child to run herself breathless. Minnie turned away sulking.

"Come, come," admonished Sarah, to distract Minnie, who, mistaking this for an order to help set the table, brought the cups from the shelf over the sink.

Breakfast over, Elias left saying he expected to return earlier than the evening before, when he had been detained in conversation with the boss.

As soon as the door closed on him, Sarah turned to Minnie.

"Do not forget to bring the kerosene. Tell the groceryman to put it in the book."

In the book! Trust! Minnie hated taking things on trust, and she said so petulantly to her mother, who, looking away and evading the child's objection, continued: "If he says anything tell him your papa is working and your mama will soon pay the bill." Some expression on her mother's face left the child silent, apparently

acquiescent. "I think I will be home when you come from school," Sarah continued, "but if I am not, then put the bedding out on the fire escape."

"Why can't Jacob do it?" Minnie asked in a fretted tone.

Sarah turned to the boy: "You do it, Jacob, then."

"I peddle papers; ain' that enough?"

He was right. Sarah lacking the energy for dispute, spoke in a voice full of impending tears:

"Look, look how they quarrel with me! *She* does not want to do it, *he* does not want to do it—everything falls to me to do. Woe is me!"

Minnie, who suffered when her mother cried, repented at once.

"Aw right, ma, I'll do it—I'll *do* it." The transfer of emphasis was inspired by her mother's incredulous look.

"I am going to the Charities to get work," Sarah resumed in a colorless, weary tone. "We owe the butcher and the grocer and everybody. And you all need shoes." Jacob and Minnie regarded their feet. Sarah sighed.

"Aw right, I'll do it," Minnie again promised, feeling her assurance ought to allay her mother's worries as to debts and shoes. To be even more of a solace, she proceeded to clear the table. Jacob ensconced himself in a corner to study his arithmetic, in which he was to be examined that day.

"Is it hard?" asked Minnie.

"Not very," Jacob grunted, keeping his eyes on his book.

"Will I be able to learn it when I get up high like you?"

"Aw, shut up!" shouted Jacob. Sarah looked at him

disapprovingly. "I don' care," he said sullenly, "all the *time* she asks questions—like last night."

"Last night—I asked questions? What questions?" Minnie seemed ready to argue against the false charge to the bitter end. Sarah heard Ida turn in bed. "Be quiet," she begged.

Jacob strapped his books.

"Will you be home by dinner time?" he asked his mother as he stood at the door ready to leave.

"I don't know."

In slight embarrassment, he requested the twenty-five cents for newspapers.

Sarah repented her nocturnal rashness. Twenty-five cents was a large investment. However, she had promised; she gave him the money, cautioning him many times not to lose it while inwardly bearing bedbugs an additional grudge.

"Wait for me," Minnie called.

"No, I got to go."

Minnie darted an anxious look after her brother, snatched up her primer and started to follow when Sarah detained her for one last reminder that she was to buy kerosene.

"Aw right, mama, so a hundred times you tell me." There Jacob was gone! She had been deprived of the glory of appearing on the street beside him, perhaps of carrying some of his books, and so presenting an enviable figure before her little girl schoolmates! Oh, it made her sick!

Sarah said nothing. Perhaps the child's annoyance was justified. She lowered her head and sighed. Minnie ran out.

Sarah awakened Ida and Bubble. She dressed them

and set them to their feast of chicory and cruller.

"Hurry," she said.

"Where you gone?" asked the sleepy Ida.

"To get work."

"Where?" And Bubbele chimed in: "Yeh, where mama?"

Sarah bent over Bubbele and spoke in the confiding tone of mothers telling fairy tales:

"Mama is going to a BIG place, where they will send her by rich, RICH houses to do work, and to make money to buy Bubbele cakie, and—and——" Sarah's inventiveness gave out. She paused and continued with greater energy:—"and chicken, CHICKEN for Bubbele!" She smothered the baby with passionate kisses.

"Cakie and chicken!" Ida repeated, imitating her mother's tone.

Bubbele deigned to respond with the condescension of a baby in any household:

"Yeh, aw right, mama, y' kin go."

"Oh, yes? Thank you, my child."

Sarah and Ida exchanged glances and laughed.

When Sarah was ready to go, Bubbele pouted and seemed to change her mind concerning the leave of absence. Sarah repeated her golden promise; doing so, she smiled herself out, incidentally instructing Ida not to go near the matches, not to let Bubbele do so either; to run down at eleven o'clock and buy ten cents' worth of wurst and three cents' worth of bread; to be sure to get mustard with the wurst; to put the eatables in Minnie's charge for division among them at lunch; to take care that Bubbele should not fall and hurt herself; not to fall herself; not to let Foxy run wild; under no circumstances to go near the open windows.

Ida listened intelligently, and Sarah left without misgivings; for after all Ida was nearly seven.

On the street, meeting Mrs. Ratkin, Sarah recklessly informed her of the bad night they had had.

Mrs. Ratkin did not see what *she* could do about it; since it was not her fault she did not see why Mrs. Mendel bothered her about it. As Sarah walked off, she thought: "Nu, stay at home and clean. Goes out like a whole lady."

X

The hours seemed endless to the two small children. But they made the best of the long wait, buoyed up by the promise of good things to eat. It was a relief, however, when eleven o'clock came and with it the break. Ida perked up and summoned Bubbele to accompany her on the errand of wurst, bread and mustard. She closed the door hastily and forthwith had reason to repent. The key of the patent lock had been left sticking inside. For a moment she was greatly disturbed; then she bethought herself of the fire-escape window, accessible by way of their neighbor's flat, and all was well again in Ida's world.

The delectables purchased, the three waited on the street for Jacob and Minnie, who at last appeared. Ida cautiously broached the subject of the lockout, supplementing her account with the distressing information that Bubbele made her "*sick!*" that she had "*ranned*" in the gutter in front of "*ninety thousand*" trucks and nearly got "*murdered*" over seventy times. She depended upon the martyrdom entailed by her monitorship to neutralize the offense of her forgetfulness. And

it did. Neither Jacob nor Minnie complained, Minnie out of sheer gladness to have Bubbele there safe and sound. As they mounted the stairs, Jacob asked when their mother was coming back.

"To-morrow," said Ida.

Minnie dropped Bubbele's hand and stopped short. "To-morrow!" she and Jacob exclaimed simultaneously.

"Yeh." Ida looked at Minnie. "She said you shouldn't go no more to school to-day, you should stay home." The greater their incredulity the more Ida tried to convince them. "I should live so," she ended. Whereupon they all resumed their upward climb, the one least conscious of complications being Foxy. Blessed are the ignorant!

Timidly knocking at the neighbor's door, Minnie asked permission to climb across the fire escape into her "house." Jacob, with a natural aversion for all neighbors, had refused to embark on the enterprize.

The neighbor was willing, glad, indeed, to accommodate the Mendels, who had extended her the same courtesy. Minnie crawled through the window out on the fire escape, which barely touched the window of her "house." She put one foot over the railing on to the window sill of the Mendel kitchen and with one hand grasped the window frame. Then she swung the second foot over swiftly.

The Mendel dwelling was four stories high. A slight mis-step would have landed Minnie in Kingdom Come. But she performed the acrobatic feat without a mis-step. Surely it is an inconsistent Power which watches over the children of the lowly, lavishing dirt, disease, and starvation upon them on the one hand, and, on the other hand, rescuing them from trucks and falls.

Mrs. Ratkin just then in the yard wanted to scream, yet had sufficient presence of mind to consider it might frighten Minnie and be her undoing. When the child finally disappeared in safety, she shrugged her shoulders and mumbled: "Such a mother! To leave her children alone like that. A *chutzpeh* (cheek). Only a *Deitschke* would do it." Mrs. Ratkin had previously questioned the two younger children on the street concerning their mother's whereabouts. "She went uptown," Ida had said; from which Mrs. Ratkin concluded that Sarah was enjoying a vain social call.

Minnie opened the door for the ravenously hungry group, who without further preliminary than the opening of the parcel for a frank exposure of the wurst, mustard and bread, sat down to eat. Each of the children gave Foxy an occasional morsel. Jacob offered him the skin of his piece of wurst generously spread with mustard. The dog looked decidedly unappreciative of the joke; the children laughed. Minnie called Foxy to her, cooed to him, and with a loving pat gave him her last piece of wurst, which Foxy consumed with lightning rapidity.

"Who's gonna bring supper?" inquired Jacob as he was getting ready to leave.

"Papa'll bring it. Mama said so," replied Ida, stretching her imagination. Jacob and Minnie stared. They were puzzled beyond words. But Jacob was not one to wrestle with problems. Before going out he asked Minnie to see to it that their father kept supper for him; he might be detained selling his larger stock of newspapers, he said. Minnie promised.

As soon as he was out Minnie turned to Ida.

"Are you sure mama ain' coming home?" she asked earnestly.

"Honest." Ida laid her hand over her heart.

Minnie was convinced.

She went about quietly cleaning the table and picking up scraps from the floor. It occurred to her that since her mother was to absent herself for so long, she herself ought to clean the place against vermin.

"I'm gone down to buy kerosene," she said.

The children were expecting her to join them in a game of jacks. Bubbele pouted.

"You never play wid me," she wailed.

"It will bite papa and mama, and Bubbele too, tonight if I don' spill kerosene," Minnie emphatically explained.

Bubbele capitulated after her big sister had promised to come back in a "second." Perhaps she came back in less than a second, she was so out of breath.

The first thing Minnie did was to struggle with the tightly imbedded cork. She got it out with a jerk, spilling lots of the fluid over her person. Next she and Ida brought all the bedding to the fire escape; Bubbele felt useful carrying a single sheet. These things accomplished, Minnie saturated the low woodwork of the bedroom, the floor, the spring, the frame of the bed, the cots. Next she brought the bedding in again and bestowed a fair dose upon each piece. So much of the liquid covered her own person by this time that she was beginning to be more of a smell than a body.

Sarah returned as the Augean task was nearing completion. She was almost overcome by the stench, and for a moment was too puzzled to realize what was going on. Then she automatically dropped several packages out of her tired arms and shrieked:

"God mine, what did you *do*? How did you *dare*?" She slapped the diligent Minnie.

Minnie stood speechless. Sarah, in a passion, shook the child with all her might, and gave her a push which sent her tumbling on to the floor. Her face struck against the table.

Bubbele began to cry; Foxy to bark; Ida crouched in a far corner of the room; Minnie shrieked.

Blood! Sarah was terrified. Rushing to Minnie she raised her from the floor and shouted to Ida to bring water. Minnie's nose was bleeding.

While performing first-aid to the injured, Sarah bestowed much petting and many kisses.

"But why did you *do* it?" the mother implored in anguish, holding a wet cloth against the weeping child's nose.

Minnie explained between sobs and heavings.

"Ida said you would'n' come home till to-morrow, and I thought it would bite papa to-night if I did'n' do it by myself."

Sarah looked at Ida with the queer feeling that insanity was lurking in the household.

"To-morrow! Who said to-morrow?"

"I had afraid to stay home alone," Ida wailed. "Bubbele and me—Bubbele near got ranned over——" She ended in copious tears.

Sarah sighed, resigning herself to the tangle and the stench. When Minnie felt better, she laid her on the lounge, and wearily restored the bedding to the fire escape and the cots to the hall.

The first thing Elias said when he returned in the evening was:

"What's the matter with her nose?" There was much concern in his voice. Indeed the organ had assumed almost double proportions. Sarah was very contrite.

"I was so angry about the stench that I nearly killed her. Poor childie, she meant it well. I gave her such a push that it would have killed her but for better luck." Reflectively she added: "I could have killed anybody after such a day as this."

Elias listened puzzled. What difference in this day from other days had warranted his wife taking chances with the life of their eldest little daughter? Sarah was fast returning to her old ways. He made no complaint, but he was annoyed.

"What was the *matter* with the day?" he asked.

XI

Self-consciousness disappears with the occurrence of the unusual. Therefore, without constraint Sarah recounted her experiences at the Charities. She spoke hastily, excitedly, even touching Elias's arm when she thought he was allowing his attention to be distracted by one of the children.

When she called for Mira, she found her still cleaning her three rooms, and the operation continued for a full hour; after which Mira herself needed a cleaning, and this consumed more time. Thus, it was after eleven o'clock that they started out, and as they footed it the whole way, they did not reach the Charities until noon.

"On pins and needles I sat in her house on account of the children," Sarah told Elias.

At the Charities door Mira, drawing her shawl about her with a touch of smugness, said she would wait for Sarah on the street. "Time enough to go inside when one has to," she said with a smile. This cut Sarah,

who interpreted it as a hint at social superiority and felt it an audacity; Sarah's ancestry included fewer needy ones than Mira's. If one were to go by that law she was certainly Mira's superior. "But when one is down oneself——" She lowered her eyes and sighed.

Elias sensed with a pang that she blamed him for her social deterioration. "But who wanted her to go?" he defended himself. "If I had known, she would not have gone." He sighed and looked through the window.

Sarah had entered the Charities alone, and from sheer fright and dejection had slunk into the first room she saw. It happened to be the right room.

* * * * *

"What is your name, please?" asked the Lady at the desk.

The man darted a quick, nervous glance around the room, then brought his eyes back to his interlocutor.

"Huh?" He held his mouth agape.

"What is your name?" This time there was a slight frostiness in the Lady's tone.

The applicant grew still more uncomfortable. In his nervousness he turned his head squarely away from the desk, but quickly faced around again. The Lady raised her voice and put the question in Yiddish. She succeeded in eliciting a steadfast regard of her face. She asked again: "What—is—your—name?" with freezing iciness. The man dropped his eyes. Some ill fate led him to shuffle on his feet and look backwards once more.

"I am talking to *you*," the Lady shouted, "to you! Can't you understand when a person asks you your *name*?" In an abandonment of disgust she added in English: "For goodness' sake!" Several clerks in the large room raised their heads, and the Head of the

Department, an employee of many years' standing, ruffled her forehead in irritation.

The shock of the Lady's louder tone brought the applicant to his senses. As a matter of fact, he quite grasped the question and had known he was the one addressed, but somehow his tongue had failed to serve him. With awakened spirit he threw his head back to help convey the impression that while he *had* not understood, he now *did*, and said: "Uh, sure. My name? Itzick."

The Lady proceeded to write. "Your second name?"

As he had never been sick, Itzick promptly answered it had not been necessary to give him a second name.

It was very trying. Behind Itzick waited a long line of men and women. The Head of the Department sent frequent inquiring glances to indicate that the line should diminish more rapidly. The Lady exploded.

"Sick! Who asked you about sick? Your second *name*?" Under her breath she muttered: "Stupid!" and flushed patches appeared on her tired face.

Itzick's "next" dug his knuckles into Itzick's ribs and explained in a whisper that she wanted his family name. Itzick, his face purple, intended to tell her he had thought she meant his second *first* name, which orthodox Jews give only in cases of severe illness, but he merely answered, praying for the roof to come down on his head and crush him:

"Uh, sure, Kramer." His knees shook, yet he made an outward show of assurance.

"Thank God!" said the Lady, though her face retained its expression of disgust. She looked up at Itzick, whose eyes, meeting hers, closed quickly, opened, and closed quickly again.

"Where do you live?"

Itzick Kramer's heart beat fast with the horror of another question. He was conscious that his face had reddened, which made him redden the more. He wished he could tear himself to pieces.

"Around the block."

Itzick Kramer's "next" would have "put him wise" to the specific information required, but the Lady's countenance so obviously threatened a volcanic eruption that he felt compelled to preserve his own safety. Itzick Kramer's "next" coughed and put his hand up to his mouth so as to hide the fact from the lady that the hand was originally intended to journey to Itzick Kramer's ribs.

There was a hush of Something Terrible in the air.

"Around the block?" shouted the Lady with the rising inflection that democratically proclaimed her one of Itzick Kramer's compatriots. "What do—what *street*? What *number*? Can't you understand that I have to write it in a book? Where do you all get your heads?" she ended almost in a wail, at her wits' end.

The Department Head came upon the scene. Experience had by now sapped this Lady dry of explosiveness.

"Miss," said she in a dignified tone, "if you cannot get the information you need, send them away; do not raise your voice; it disturbs everyone in the office." Quietly, then, she ordered Itzick Kramer out of the line, telling him to *hear*, or go home and wash his ears.

Itzick flushed a deeper purple. With that sudden insurrection which at times comes to timid natures, he refused to leave. He had done nothing wrong, he said. The Department Head summoned a man who was employed to weed out disturbers, and soon Itzick Kramer, overcome by physical superiority, found himself ejected into the callous Great Outdoors.

"The impudence!" muttered the Department Head as she made her way back to her desk, meanwhile, at a glance, taking inventory of the persons in the line. The soul of the line trembled.

Itzick Kramer's "next" automatically fell into place for the quizzing. The first two questions were answered with the brilliance of a school boy who has learned his lesson by heart. The third question held the horror of the Unknown. He strained his head forward to listen attentively.

"How many children," the Lady asked in Yiddish, "have you *under*" (jerking her thumb downward) "fourteen years of age, and how many children have you *over*" (jerking her thumb upward) "fourteen years of age?" She put the question very slowly, stressing each word, allowing time for beads of perspiration to break out on the man's anxious face and for his heart to beat so rapidly that his attention was divided between what she asked and that organ. When finally she completed the question and he quite grasped it, he experienced the greatest relief. He took a deep breath. Inoffensive as this act may be under ordinary circumstances, it can have a most irritating effect upon a Lady waiting, whose business it is to elicit replies at maximum speed. The Lady moved nervously in her chair and drew up her toes inside her shoes. The man, feeling her exacerbation, desired to say the right thing quickly, but as nothing can so readily make a clean sweep of intelligence as nervousness, he began enumerating: "Lebe is not yet ten——" he stopped for breath—"Yudel is already eleven——" He took another breath.

The Lady's demeanor evinced increasing impatience. Schmuel Rothenberg, thinking to make haste, enumerated more hurriedly.

"Bashele should live and be well." Bashele was the ailing youngest.

"How——" began the Lady, interrupting him, but Schmucl Rothenberg humbly pleaded:

"Oh, Lady, Lady, wait a minute." She waited. Running his tongue over his upper lip and raising his shoulders, as if taking a new lease on energy, he went on, his knees shaking:

"Bashele is three years—and two older—oldest died, may it never happen to you!" Sadness came into the man's eyes; he looked down at his feet.

"Have you any children over fourteen years?" The Lady asked, relaxing from sheer fatigue.

"I have—that is, I had——"

This was too much for human endurance.

"Oh, for goodness' sake!" the Lady exclaimed as loudly as she dared, bearing the Department Head in mind.

"Lady—Lady——" Schmucl Rothenberg's tone and the anxious expression of his face would have melted a heart harder than the Lady's.

"Can't you answer a single question straight?" she fairly begged.

"Yes, yes, Lady," Schmucl Rothenberg assured her, not understanding a single word, knowing only there was pleading in her voice. Suddenly his nervousness left him completely, as so often happens when people are roused to a point beyond themselves, and he answered without further hesitancy:

"The other children died; the four are all younger."

"Thank God!" the Lady exclaimed with so much sarcasm that some in the line smiled and more daring ones laughed.

To Schmuel Rothenberg it appeared that she thanked God because his children had died. He winced and dropped his eyes.

"What is your trade?"

"Nothing."

The Lady placed him on the list of "Useful Men," wrote something on a ticket, gave it to him, and told him to come the next day.

"To-morrow! Not to-day?" There was keen disappointment in the man's voice. Schmuel Rothenberg's life was a perpetual animal terror as to mere livelihood.

From the Lady's face it was clear he was to move on and make room for the next. He moved on, meditatively repeating "To-morrow!" as he slowly walked out of the room.

* * * * *

Before long the Department Head decided to form two lines of the remaining applicants, and Sarah was among the first to be interrogated.

"I grew hot and cold," she said, "but my Lady was really a nice girl, a golden girl. She talked with me as if she was an old friend who had known me all her life. She wants me to work in her house Sundays, and will give me two more Ladies."

Did Sarah have to go back there? This concerned Elias, distressed by her tales beyond any interest in her success.

It now came Sarah's turn to exclaim with the Lady's fervor: "*Thank God!*" No, she did not have to go back.

The finality of her tone must have been sport for the Fates.

"And Mira, did she wait for you?"

"Yes, and lucky, too, because I had such a pain in my side that I had to go to her home and lie down."

For a time neither Sarah nor Elias spoke. Then Sarah, examining her apron as if for some definite purpose, said reflectively:

"I felt when I left there as if I had been spilt with *pamoonitza* (slops). And that is for work. How must it be when one comes for money!" She shuddered. Elias looked at her attentively.

"Then after *that* I came home to find the stench of kerosene." Sarah looked at Minnie asleep on the lounge, and sighed. "I nearly killed her." How Sarah's heart ached!

The two younger children were playing marbles on the floor. In a farther corner of the room, ink on the floor and his geography book on his lap serving as a desk, Jacob sat studying his lessons.

As the supper dishes had not yet been cleared away, Sarah rose to go about her tasks. Elias from diffidence checked his impulse to help her; instead he brought in the bedding from the fire escape. Later they sat down, and Elias read aloud the day's news.

At bed time, Jacob, at Elias' instructions, helped to set up the cots, as Minnie was still asleep. When Sarah went to undress her, Minnie woke up. "I'll get undressed by myself," she said testily, drawing away from her mother and feeling her nose. Sarah's eyes filled with tears; she turned away.

Amid childish pranks and laughter, Elias put the two younger ones to bed. Then he himself retired. Soon all was still.

Mrs. Ratkin, passing as she extinguished the gas in the hall, thought sneeringly:

"God be thanked, it is quiet here." Sing-Sing had effected a cure. But *what* a measure! A blight never to be lived down.

XII

The following Sunday Sarah did her first day's work at the "golden" Lady's home. It was a modest apartment shared by several girls. Sarah was to do the week's washing and Grand Cleaning, as the girls who went out to work could do only makeshift cleaning during the week.

Ella Liebman, the "golden" Lady, gave Sarah, as she had promised, the names of two other Ladies who had applied to the Charities Employment Bureau for "a nice woman, one who would appreciate kind treatment."

On her second Sunday at Miss Liebman's Sarah described her other employers. Mrs. Finkelstein, who engaged her for Tuesdays, was "a simple, nice woman," she said; while Mrs. Roth, who kept a servant for the general housework and for whom she was to do washing on Thursdays, was "a high-tone Americaner." Mrs. Roth had insisted on Fridays. "On Fridays I have my own Sabbath to make," said Sarah, to whose proud nature neglecting Sabbath preparation meant a diminution of family dignity. It was one of Sarah's inconsistencies that, little as she felt for the Sabbath, she never missed making the special preparations for it, as had her mother before her.

Mrs. Roth was, indeed, the sort of person whose generosity follows the pattern of generosity set by Fate

itself. For Sarah, coming from the Charities—evidence of humblest position and possession—Mrs. Roth deemed it proper that the normal working day should be lengthened by two hours and the normal wages curtailed by twenty-five cents. In her opinion, a charity subject who dictated the terms of a benefaction was an ingrate.

Sarah, when applying to Mrs. Roth, timidly told her that the Charities Lady paid her one dollar for the day and kept her only until four o'clock, thus giving her time to prepare her own family's supper. Mrs. Roth, mildly annoyed, wondered by what right Miss Liebman set the standard of hours and wages, and became at once skeptical as to Sarah's niceness. However, she acceded to the terms, but with a gingerliness that did not escape Sarah's sensitive perceptions.

Once prejudiced, Mrs. Roth adopted a consistently supercilious manner. She refrained from greeting Sarah at either her coming or going, and looked beyond her when she entered the room in which Sarah stood washing the clothes. Sarah never left Mrs. Roth without being greatly wrought up.

At the end of a number of weeks, during which she regularly poured out the tale of her grievances to Miss Liebman, who listened with a social worker's sympathy for the types of Sarah, she came one Sunday more than usually excited. It appeared that the previous Thursday Sarah had informed Mrs. Roth she had a pain in her side and could not do her washing; that Mrs. Roth had remonstrated emphatically:

"A pain in the side! Goodness, that is not so awful! *I* get a pain in my side, too." Sarah was about to agree to do her lighter washing when the lady added:

"A poor woman should not be so particular." Sarah was up in arms.

"You can do your *own* washing!" she flung out. While making for the door she heard:

"The impudence of these people! A little pain in the side and they cannot do a speck of washing! And when her child, her Bubbele, had a tiny cold, she did not come at all. These people are, honestly, more particular about themselves than we are about ourselves and our children."

"God save me from such other ladies!" Sarah said to Miss Liebman, and added: "After all, am I not a woman just like she is? And if my side hurts, must it hurt less than hers because it is *my* side? Should one woman not sympathize with another woman? Am I made of wood and she of gold? *Fui!*" Sarah bent lower over the washtub. Miss Liebman looked at her quizzically. "She is a high-tone lady. From home we are not from the garbage-can either." Sarah sighed and rubbed harder, wishing all manner of ill luck on the Sabbath.

Sarah's version of the Mrs. Roth incident as communicated to Elias contained the additional reflection that the woman was a *pastkootzute* (an ugly, nasty one): upon saying which she spit vehemently into the sink and secretly hoped Elias was feeling as badly as she.

One Sunday later Miss Liebman asked Sarah if she cared to take another place.

"No," she said, "I do not want another Mrs. Roth." After a moment's silence she added musingly: "When the children will need shoes again, it will be hard." Suddenly, with a rueful grimace she added: "Oh, let

God worry a little." She looked up. They laughed. Miss Liebman was growing fond of Sarah.

* * * * *

And God must have worried; the need-for-shoes period brought its own solution.

By some providence the butcher in the neighborhood was bereft of his wife, who every Friday had plucked the chickens. In his predicament he recalled that Sarah had often taken meat on trust and decided she might be glad to make a little extra money. Sarah eagerly accepted the work, which was to be done in the very early morning hours on Fridays and the days preceding the Holy Days. Minnie, "a smart girl," could help, as the butcher suggested.

The period of greater affluence for the Mendels brought greater peace, but not according to the wagging of Mrs. Ratkin's tongue. Through that censorious medium Sarah's character remained as black as ever with the neighbors, who were predisposed to antagonism because of Sarah's standoffishness, which they misconstrued as an assumption of superiority, whereas it sprang from diffidence and a desire to hide her home difficulties.

How was it, then, that Sarah raised her voice so loud that neighbors could hear, and resorted to the publicity of a court scene?

Who shall stand in judgment on a human being at his wits' end? Only he who would call the drowning man who catches at a straw a fool.

XIII

On an afternoon three months later, the quarter gas meter in the Mendel household burned low, and Sarah

was without the quarter necessary to brace it. She was in a quandary, the supper was only half cooked. Count as many times as she would, the loose change in the home treasury aggregated only twenty-two cents. Presently she thought of an old kerosene stove which had been put away under the bed, never to be used again. There was kerosene in the house, and the stove might work well enough to finish the meal on anyway. With much effort she extracted it and carried it into the room-of-all-affairs. She gave it a thorough cleaning, and with the aid of a broken saucer got it to stand firmly on the coal stove. Then she found there was not a match in the house! She looked down in the yard for Minnie, intending to send her to the grocery store for matches. The child was not to be seen. Sarah had just about resigned herself to the descent and ascent of the four flights of stairs, when the door burst open and a very excited Minnie and a wildly barking Foxy dashed in. One would have thought a deadly enemy was in pursuit.

"What's the matter?" cried Sarah. The child stuck her thumb in her mouth and lowered her head. Sarah, too preoccupied with her own plight, did not press for an explanation. She told Minnie to go on the errand.

"I don' wanna," Minnie whimpered.

"You don't want to? Why?"

"Abie——"

"Abie what?"

"Abie's down by the yard, and I have afraid."

"Children's nonsense," thought Sarah glancing down in the yard again. "He's not there. Don't look in the yard. Run right out," she urged Minnie gently.

The child, sensing her mother's weariness, consented to go, though as she descended the stairs and ran

through the hall, she was in mortal terror of encountering Abie.

A little while before she had gone down to the yard to play with Foxy. Abie standing in the doorway of the rear tenement had instantly hailed her with "Hello, Fights!" Whether Abie called her Fights "for fun" or "for fair" made no difference to Minnie; the epithet jarred her sensibilities. She always colored and experienced a moment of helplessness, which ended in a weak order to Abie to "shut up." This time in the moment of her helplessness she wavered between stooping down to Foxy and looking over at Abie. She looked at Abie. His smile obviously declared he meant "Hello, Fights" for fun. Nevertheless Minnie ordered him to "shut up——" but shyly, hesitatingly, as she was not in a mood for a squabble. Abie, however, had no ear for subtleties. "Fights," he repeated just to tease, coming closer.

"I tell you, shut up!" shouted Minnie stamping her foot.

Foxy, scenting a fray, assumed a belligerent attitude.

"Don' che say like that," Abie warned with a superior flutter of his eyelids, annoyed at Minnie's inability to take his teasing and giving her a scornful look as she edged away from him.

"So don' *you*!"

"Uh, it's fooling. Don' che know fooling—Fights!"

Tears of anger and impotence came to her eyes; her little heart fluttered and her chest heaved. Abie was a "murder."

Gathering Foxy up in her arms she made hastily for the front tenement. Suddenly she faced about.

"You shut up!" she cried, her face deeply flushed. "Shut up, or—or I'll sig'm on you!" Her threat was

weak and the grand finale, uttered in a choked voice, was even weaker. "You—bum—you!"

Yet the thrust went home. It aroused Abie's wrath; his eyes threatened dire consequences. Instantly Minnie resorted to aggressive self-defense.

"Sig'm, Foxy, sig'm!"

Foxy, with a fine sense of loyalty, had already disengaged himself from Minnie's hold and was barking menacingly. He darted in a semi-circle towards Abie, which plainly promised defense of his mistress, right or wrong. At Minnie's second bidding Foxy sprang upon Abie. Whereupon Minnie, womanlike, recalled him.

Abie, though in truth frightened, pretended contempt for her kindly intervention.

"Aw, mind your business," he said.

"You should die in a black coffin wid your mama and your papa together!"

Abie's next strategic move, Minnie rapidly decided, would be one which would make it wiser for her to seek immediate safety. At full speed she dashed toward the door of the front tenement. Foxy's loyalty could no longer bear restraint. He snapped at Abie's legs, which legs, in the teeth of actuality, were compelled to relax in their furtive effort to bar Minnie's race to safety. It so happened, too, that Abie stumbled, landing on the palm of his hands and the tip of his nose just grazing the front tenement threshold. Foxy jumped blithely over his form and barking triumphantly joined his mistress at the bottom of the stairs.

Abie, from his prostrate position, in the knowledge that he was the loser, hurled defiantly:

"Fights, Fights! Your mama and your papa fights

like Irish bums. You got your papa arrested. You made believe he was by your cousin in Brooklyn. Fights!"

Minnie powerless to retort rapidly mounted the stairs followed by Foxy.

Abie picking himself up removed a splinter from his finger and felt of the bruised tip of his nose. He stood in meditation from which he was roused presently by an imperative call:

"Abie, Abie!"

Abie sent his gaze up the impertinent height of the rear tenement and beheld the face of his mother.

"Wha' do you wan'?"

"Kom up stez en go buy ah pickle."

"Aw say, mama!" He hesitated a moment; then his pent-up anger burst. "Kom up stez and go buy ah pickle," he mimicked. Instantly he realized his misdemeanor and the possibly disastrous consequences. "Aw, ma, always me. Can' che send the other ones once?" he cried sulkily.

"Abie!" There was that in his mother's tone which carried the threat: "Wait till your papa comes home." Abie had no great fondness for the prehistoric custom to which his father resorted, especially since the innovation of a five-tongue strap had added decided physical discomfort to the original humility of the operation.

"Aw, ma, I'm tired," he wailed. But he made for the rear tenement. His mother withdrew her head from the window.

Properly financed, Abie was soon retracing his steps to purchase the pickle for the family supper.

Meanwhile, as we know, Minnie's mother had delegated her purchasing agent of a box of matches. The

two belligerents met in the grocery store. At sight of Abie, Minnie was alarmed. She moved closer to the store-keeper. But Abie was now in a different mood. He followed Minnie and half-whispered: "I ain' gonna hi' che. Don' be afraid." Minnie showed no confidence. He added reassuringly: "I should live so, I ain' gonna hi' che." Though her skepticism was somewhat allayed, Minnie remained unwilling to risk too close proximity. Even on the street she lagged a trifle behind. But when Abie sincerely asked her, apropos of nothing and quite as if there had been no rupture in their relationship: "Say, Minn, who do you like bedder, your mama or your papa?" she relaxed entirely.

"Both," she answered with an air of defiance.

"But I *mean*, if God would ask you who He should make die first, your mama or your papa, who would you say?"

"Not neither my mama or my papa."

Abie manifested his impatience by an especial twist of his body, reserved for just such trying moments. Minnie slipped a few inches behind.

"Aw, I ain' gonna hi' che, crazy. But I mean *first*, 'Not neither' ain' no '*first*.'"

Minnie inhaled deeply. She meant to hold to her point. Bobbing her head for emphasis, she repeated: "I like my mama and my papa."

Abie expressed his vast contempt of this miniature female by disdainfully mimicking in falsetto:

"I like my mama and my papa." It occurred to him to demonstrate by masculine precept, and he told her to ask *him* whom *he* liked better, *his* father or *his* mother. Minnie kept quiet. "Well," Abie reiterated, "ask me!"

Here the pickle divorced itself from its wrapping and dropped to the slanting sidewalk:

"Oo! Oo!" cried Minnie, wringing her hands. "Your papa'll *murder* you!"

Abie, with his foot intercepted the pickle as it was rolling into the gutter, and with his dirty hand brushed off the dirt it had gathered. When it was restored to its wrapping, he answered Minnie: "No, he won't," his voice, however, carrying no conviction. Minnie took up the conversation where it had been broken off and asked rather weakly:

"Who do you like bedder, Abie, your mama or your papa?"

Abie, recalled to a lively sense of his father's hard hand by Minnie's cry, "Your papa'll murder you," forgot that he was to demonstrate by precept and answer with a simple "I like my mama bedder." Shuffling the dust under his feet, he said in an aggrieved tone:

"I don' like my papa anyhow. All the time he licks me." Abie's tone caused Minnie to look sideways at him. Sincerity is never lost on children. Abie went on musingly: "I'll get him arrested."

Minnie started as from a galvanic shock. "Oo, don' che," she cut in, "don' che never." She stopped still and confronted him.

"I will so. Wha' do *you* care?"

Minnie saw Abie already rushing into the teeth of this calamity. Her little heart went through a spasm of terror.

"The policemen's fresh things. They pull your papa," she said earnestly. Abie made no rejoinder. "They pulled my papa."

"Yeh?" He gave her a swift inquisitive glance.

Realizing she had confirmed Abie's suspicion of the

family skeleton, Minnie turned self-conscious; she stuck her thumb in her mouth and lowered her eyes. They walked on in silence. Soon Abie said contemplatively:

"Let 'em pull. He licks me. He murders me for nothin'."

On the score of "murderings" Minnie was exceedingly sympathetic. Though corporal punishment was not included in the bill of miseries of the Mendel children (the once when Sarah struck Minnie was the rare exception), Minnie had sufficient imagination to divine the horrific import of the shrill shrieks that issued from other homes in the tenements.

Minnie was preoccupied and made no reply. Abie asked *sotto voce*:

"Will you show me where?"

Minnie looked thoughtfully at him, then spoke. What she said was so utterly irrelevant that he stared as though she had gone crazy.

"So let's us get married," she said just so.

The question of marriage between them had been broached before, but always by Abie. Minnie only sought diversion now from the subject that had inveigled her into an admission of a family skeleton.

Abie was thoroughly disgusted with the irrelevancy and its author.

"Uh, crazy, don' che know only big peoples dass get married like your mama and your papa? CRAZY CAT!"

"I mean," she said a little ashamed that she was lacking in knowledge on this subject whereas Abie seemed to be very wise, "when like to-morrow and over-to-morrow, like ten years, then we dass can."

"We dass if we wanna," quoth Abie, with a sapient nod of his head.

Hitherto, whenever Abie had asked *her* if she would

marry him when he "got a man" her reply had been the provisional one, "Yeh, if you'll be a teacher."

Glad now of an avenue of escape, Minnie exclaimed unconditionally:

"Yeh, I wanna."

They reached the stairs of the front tenement. Minnie began skipingly to ascend. Abie proceeded to the yard, from where he called back sing-song:

"MI—IN!"

Minnie stopped at the middle of the first flight.

"Wha' do you wan'?"

"Come back." Minnie turned about. They met at the foot of the stairs.

"I forgot," said he. "To-morrow, so will you show me by the court?"

She succumbed to his more masterful will. "If you don' tell out," she said softly.

"Uh," he replied, mistaking her meaning. "I knowed all the time, only I didn't said ever, because my mama told me I dassn't. My mama sawn you go into the court wid her own eyes. She told my papa by the night."

Minnie, unable to meet the situation, stuck her thumb in her mouth. After a perceptible pause she argued weakly:

"But they don' fights no more." Her head was lowered; she looked at him shamefacedly.

"To-morrow, so will you show me by the court?" he asked again.

"Aw right, to-morrow," she promised faintly.

"Aw right." Abie was satisfied. They turned on their respective ways; but in a moment he called again:

"MI-IN!"

"Wha' do you wan'?"

"Don' tell nobody. It's gonna be a secret."

Minnie waited a second. "Aw right, yeh, no, I won'," she promised, and skipped along.

XIV

The Ratkins' two-room dwelling on the top floor was identical with the Mendels'. The furnishings of the room-of-all-affairs comprised one large table, one small table, four wooden chairs, a dilapidated green plush lounge, a gas stove, and a coal stove. The interior decorations consisted of a small looking-glass hanging on the wall between the two windows, just as at the Mendels', and several enlarged colored photographs of deceased relatives—relics of the Ratkins' affluent days. The furnishings of the bedroom were a bed, a cot, a chair and a wooden egg-box for the family linens. On the floor reposed another remnant of their better days, a mat on which a white, straight-backed dog sat stiffly planted on a bright green background.

The series of misfortunes which brought the Ratkins down in the world began with the loss, in quick succession, of three children, which left them with only Abie and a pair of twin girls of eight. After that, as so often happens, there followed difficulties one upon the other, topped by a severe illness in Mr. Ratkin, which, truth to tell, left him slightly unbalanced. Mrs. Ratkin had been compelled to become janitress of the two tenements. When Mr. Ratkin finally recovered sufficiently to work, he went into the business of rag-picking and cashing old clothes in order to be able to carry out his physician's prescription to stay in the "fresh air."

Mr. Ratkin's odd sing-song cry, "I cash clothes!" was a source of amusement to East Side urchins while to older folks it proclaimed him a "crazy man." To the latter Mr. Ratkin was indifferent; and as for the former, the greater the number that followed him from street to street and the more heartily they laughed, the greater was his pleasure and the more of the Gemorrah sing-song did he put into his tune.

Mrs. Ratkin was busy washing and combing the hair of the twins when Abie returned with the pickle. "Woe is me," she cried, "what took you so long? Always when I send you somewhere it takes you a year to return. You loaf around——"

"Aw, mama!" growled Abie, in no mood to be tolerant of criticism.

Mrs. Ratkin remained indifferent to her son's mood. "How long does it take to go to the grocery store and back?" she nagged. "A year? You *go* and you *come*—not——"

"Mama, you make me sick," her son interrupted, then added sulkily to avert the outburst that her expression portended:

"Aw, lemme alone," and walked into the bedroom.

The bedroom was his place of refuge when under attack by either parent. For the ceremony of a beating, Mr. Ratkin always had to extricate his son from the mass of junk under the bed; the space under the bed served the Ratkins as it did other East Siders as a garret. It was here that Abie had formulated plans for seeking vengeance upon his father for his brutality. His mother's gossip about the Mendels had sowed the seed of retribution.

For some time Mrs. Ratkin silently concentrated her

energies on her daughter's heads, saturating their hair with sugar water and twisting it into a row of perfectly made curls. The feat accomplished, she held them at arm's length and surveyed them with pride and pleasure. Removing the combings from the comb, she ordered Abie to go set the table for supper as Mr. Ratkin would soon be coming home, then to sweep the floor and straighten the chairs. . . . In not discriminating in favor of the male of the species, the Ratkin household was an exception to most Jewish households. The men had to do housework. Mrs. Ratkin could not "tear herself to pieces." "To be a janitor is enough for one piece of a woman," she would say. Mr. Ratkin thought it was best to humor her on that score; he helped and he compelled his son to do the same.

Abie set the table. Service with the Ratkins also was a simple affair. When soup was served each was given an individual plate. For "dry" meals Mr. Ratkin alone was so graced, and Abie and the twins ate from pieces of newspaper, while Mrs. Ratkin, dispensing entirely with "the middle man," consumed directly from the pot.

At six o'clock Mr. Ratkin returned from his day of rags and old clothes besmirched and perspiring. Surely the unquestioning devotion of children is touching! The twins rushed to their half-witted father and clung to him ardently. Even Abie, who had suffered a severe licking at his hands the night before, sang out a cordial "hello." Mrs. Ratkin was even effusive in her greeting. She and her husband, in fact, were happily mated. Mr. Ratkin took her scoldings and naggings good-naturedly. Only upon Abie did Mr. Ratkin practice head-of-the-house discipline. He was determined that his son should

"grow up a person" even if he, the father, had to kill the boy to effect it. Whereas about his wife Mr. Ratkin would say good naturedly: "*Is schon far fallen*," meaning his discipline would avail nothing. And Abie, his boy spirits cramped within the confines of a pig pen, was indeed a trial.

Mr. Ratkin washed and spluttered and every now and then stopped to remark upon some trifle. Soon supper was served. Mr. Ratkin was the first to taste of the pickle. "Pooh," cried he, spitting out.

Abie stole a swift glance at his father's wry face. At the same moment Mrs. Ratkin emptied her mouthful. Immediately the twins did the same. They all made wry faces. Poor Abie edged away from his father, and when Mr. Ratkin made a slight move in his chair, he recoiled so violently that Mr. Ratkin was given a clue. Aha!

"Who went for the pickle?" he demanded, looking at his son sideways. "The sonny, I suppose." He turned his full face upon the boy.

"Woe is me!" cried Mrs. Ratkin, who had also made a shrewd guess. "It must have fallen in the gutter."

Abie sprang to his feet and made a dash for safety.

The father rose. His color was high and so was his indignation. He pointed to the chair Abie had vacated. "COME HERE!" he shouted.

Abie remained in the bedroom doorway.

"I didn' do it for spite," he said in tears, "it came out from my hand, so don' che hit me."

"I WANT THAT THERE SHOULD BE QUIET HERE!" Mr. Ratkin thundered, continuing with one long finger to point to Abie's vacant chair. Mrs. Ratkin, fearful of violence, begged both to be quiet. When

her husband grew wild Mrs. Ratkin invariably became mild. These two understood the psychology of family happiness.

Abie stood dismally devising plans for the termination of his misery and wishing he had not waited so long to take matters in hand. He hoped the policeman *would* "pull" this papa of his.

"Why did you not tell me it fell down?" asked Mrs. Ratkin gently, as she rose to wash the pickle. Abie made no reply. Going back to table she said: "Come and sit down already." Abie glanced at his father. His lowered eyes looked too ominous, and Abie did not budge. "Nu, come Abie, you must soon go and light the gas in the halls." Mrs. Ratkin gave her husband a glance that was meant to say: "Here is reason enough for granting him immunity." Mr. Ratkin looked non-committal. Abie moved cautiously back to his chair. Scarcely had he sat down when Mr. Ratkin turned swiftly and punched him in the arm. "There, that's what you get for shouting at your father!" he cried.

Springing from his seat Abie glared at his father, his heart fairly bursting with the desire for vengeance.

"For God's sake let him alone—I will perish!" cried Mrs. Ratkin with so much fervor that Mr. Ratkin settled into passivity. All was quiet. Abie reseated himself and swallowed his meal in silent tears.

When Abie was out of the room lighting the gas in the halls, Mr. Ratkin soliloquized:

"All the neighbors send their boys to peddle papers; I keep my son like the apple of my eye, and he shouts at me!" Since his conscience told him he had been unduly severe with the child he spoke in a genuinely aggrieved tone to forestall his wife's nagging.

"Who—who sends their boys to peddle papers?" demanded Mrs. Ratkin. "Nu, and lighting the gas is *no* work? When you get it into your head to pester the boy, you do it without measure." She rose and began to clear the table.

Mr. Ratkin faced about angrily.

"Jakie Mendel does not peddle papers maybe, no, what, nu? You always want to make me out for crazy."

Mrs. Ratkin went on with her work as she said:

"Mrs. Mendel is a high-tone lady, a *Deitschke*. It would not suit her to work for her children. Abie has a plain woman for a mother."

How could Mrs. Ratkin know of the chain of circumstances which had linked Sarah to the world of Useful-Women-By-the-Day? She knew of Sarah's work at the butcher's, but that, she and the neighbors agreed, would be short-lived, for was it to be expected that a *Deitschke* would remain at mean labor indefinitely? The Russian Jew of this class nurtures contempt for the German Jew because of his assumption of superior culture, and the German Jew looks down on the Russian Jew because of his alleged crudeness. A state of internal anti-Semitism!

Mr. Ratkin, ignoring this point, insisted that Jakie's father was as rich as his own son's father; Mrs. Ratkin remained silent, and there was an end of the dispute.

In the hall of the front tenement Abie met Minnie going on an errand to Mira. Seeing Abie's eyes were red-rimmed, she sang teasingly: "Cry baby!" and so saying dodged him. Abie, however, was in no mood for belligerency.

"Uh, my papa hollered on me coun a the pickle."

Minnie was at once sympathetic.

"Yeh?" she asked, drawing closer to him.

He contemplated his shoe tops while she contemplated hers.

"*You* know where," he said. "So will you take me?"

The two looked at each other. Minnie understood.

"It's by the corner—down by the street." She pointed to the right, "Where we turn in by the butcher, and then two blocks by the other way."

Abie tried to grasp her directions for reaching the Essex Market Court.

"Kin I go now?" he asked.

"Uh, no, it's only open in the morning. The judge ain' there now." She was astonished at his ignorance on the subject.

"So I'll go in the morning," he concluded, resolving to make her act as guide. The two parted. Abie finished lighting the gas and went immediately to ask his mother's permission to go out on the street. Permission granted, he proceeded in search of Essex Market Court and met Minnie returning from Mira's. She pointed out the court house to him.

"Ugh, is *that* it? I thought it was annader place. I sawn this place twenty million times."

"You go in there." Minnie pointed to the front door.

Walking home they covered in their conversation a range of philosophy from kites to cares.

XV

Abie started out on his mission of vengeance at eight o'clock the next morning; rather early for school, his father and mother thought, though making no comment. At the street door he waited in vain for Minnie. But

soon he left. Since he knew the location of the court house she was not indispensable.

Shortly afterwards Mr. Ratkin sallied forth for the day's bread-winning.

Abie had a long wait at the court house before it gave signs of life. About ten o'clock a giant policeman appeared in the doorway and ordered the urchin to move on.

"Kin I go in?" he asked.

"What do you want to go in for?"

"There's a man, he always licks me. I wanna tell the judge on him and get him arrested."

The policeman looked down on the complainant half mockingly, half questioningly. At that very moment Abie's father's voice sang: "I cash clothes." Abie's mouth remained open in the act of a word unsaid. Then he cried excitedly:

"Come—come on!" and made several hurried steps, motioning the policeman to follow. "That's him! That's the man who licks me. He murders me."

The policeman impelled by good-nature and curiosity followed the boy around the corner. There stood Mr. Ratkin, his head raised to a top-story window, from which leaned a woman. "I cash clothes." He might have been serenading the lady so much melody did he put into the refrain.

"There! That's *him*!" cried Abie all aquiver with excitement.

Mr. Ratkin beheld his son. His refrain snapped and broke. Words were too feeble to express his astonishment. He merely gaped.

"Move on!" the policeman growled, swinging his club.

"But he licks me," Abie protested, with an appealing look up at his possible Redeemer.

"What did he say? What does he want?" Mr. Ratkin asked Abie.

"He says if you lick me he'll get you arrested."

In a flash Mr. Ratkin discarded his old clothes-and-rags bag, drew in a deep breath and pounced upon His Own. The policeman saw fit to exercise his province. He collared Mr. Ratkin and forced him along. Abie made off.

Mr. Ratkin was sentenced to one night in the Essex Court lockup, regardless of his gesticulations and entreaties. He had struck a child, it was his turn now to be struck by the hand of the Law.

In gloomy speculation as to the outcome of his vengeance now that it was accomplished, and sorely beset by misgivings, Abie wandered aimlessly through the streets until driven home by hunger.

Little by little Mrs. Ratkin learned what had taken place. She gasped. She choked. She turned blue in the face. And, what was more, she was speechless! Her unprecedented speechlessness was most ominous to the petrified Abie.

"I didn' done it myself. The policeman made—Minnie—," he whimpered, shuffling to the bedroom door and succumbing to tears.

Mrs. Ratkin's eyes showed that her soul was rolling up its sleeves for the ultimate, the beating that Abie deserved. She sprang upon him fiendishly.

"Mama—ma! I didn' do it," Abie wedged in when she had to stop for breath. "Minnie Mendel told me. She took me. Uh, mama, don' hit me, don' hit me!"

Minnie Mendel! Aha! Then that black-yearred Sarah

had delegated her corrupt daughter to besmirch the Ratkin family name as she had besmirched her own! A mitigation of Abie's crime, yet the blows continued to descend until Mrs. Ratkin's wind and muscle gave out. She tottered to the lounge and sank down wailing. How could she look that Mendel woman in the face? What demon had possessed that loafer of hers to commit such a foul deed, to bring such a curse upon his innocent father's head, a father who disciplined him only that he might sow the seed of a golden manhood, the father who picked rags for him, who did not send him to peddle papers like other fathers, like the Mendel father, for example?

Abie lay on the bed sobbing. The twins howled.

But sobs and sighs, Mrs. Ratkin bethought herself, were no solution of her grave problem. She ought to go to court at once.

Abie came forward with expert information:

"The station-house is closed already," he said.

His mother glared at him.

"You loafer you—you nothing you—you piece of manure, if you say another word, I will give you a blow that you will have to gather your teeth from the floor."

Brooding silently Abie accompanied his mother and twins on the errand of reclamation.

The court house was closed.

"See I told you so," quoth Abie. A blow silenced him.

The Ratkins returning from the court house met Sarah Mendel in the hall returning from her work at Mrs. Finkelstein's. On the spur of the moment Mrs. Ratkin resolved to have it out with "that woman," to fling in her face her pernicious influence on the neighborhood, the pernicious influence of her ugly Minnie, and

incidentally to forestall a social comeback from Sarah.

Mrs. Ratkin's bill of complaints ended with Minnie's latest misdeed. Abie, she said, would never of his own accord have thought out such a thing as to send his father to Sing-Sing. Sing-Sing! Never had the neighborhood *heard* of the place until Sarah brought it to their innocent notice.

Abie slunk into a corner. The twins clung frantically to their mother's skirt. A butcher's boy passing, attracted by the loud voice, was the first to stop and listen; others followed his example. Tenants opened doors, stuck out heads, and were drawn to the scene. A yellow, shrivelled old woman with a dark gray shawl over her head, made her way falteringly through the hall to the stairs.

"Fui! Fui!" she mumbled. "Jewish women should quarrel so! It does not suit Jewish women to quarrel so." The butcher's boy laughed and scampered off. Some of the audience smiled.

The old woman spat out once, twice, thrice as she tottered up the stairs. Sarah looking after her was reminded of her mother; a peaceful old-country family scene flitted across her consciousness. She turned and mounted the steps as quickly as her tired feet would carry her.

"You think," Mrs. Ratkin hurled after her, "you can hide your own shame by bringing the same shame upon *other* people's heads. You think maybe I don't understand. But everybody in the whole neighborhood *knows* I am an honest, respectable woman who works along with her husband. But *you*, what do *you* do? You send your good, pious husband to Sing-Sing. Fui! Shame on you!"

Sarah shrinking within herself disappeared in a bend of the stairs.

Mrs. Ratkin turning to the remaining auditors began to tell of the awful character of the Sarah Mendel woman. One by one they dropped away.

When Sarah did day's work, Minnie served as the charwoman. Thursdays she scrubbed for the Sabbath. Little East Side children talk of having to do "my scrubbing," "my washing." Minnie had no knack for scrubbing. Scold her as one would, she invariably got herself wet, even to her shoes and stockings. The first sight to greet Sarah was a sopping Minnie, and it required less than this to kindle her anger to white heat. She could scarcely contain herself. She wanted to strike the child. The temptation was so great that she had to look away.

Ida and Bubbele playing near the window where the floor was scrubbed but not dry tried to rise but slipped and fell. Bubbele screamed. Her mother hushed her up. The child again tried unsuccessfully to get to her feet; she burst into a howl. Sarah was beside herself.

Minnie knelt in a puddle of water, scrubbing-brush in hand.

"Look at the water in the pail. It is filthy!" Sarah glared at her daughter, who wondered what had brought her mother home so cross.

"It's the last piece, I don' need no clean water."

Sarah swooped down upon the pail, carried it to the sink with a furious gesture, poured out the water and refilled the pail. Minnie frightened, began to cry.

"Look," Sarah shouted, "look how wet you are!" and she pulled roughly at Minnie's dress.

"Oh, mama!"

"Cry a little! Cry! You——" Sarah broke off in an honest effort to control herself.

A sobbing Minnie rose from the floor and walked into the bedroom. When a child of eight has scrubbed two floors, has laid clean newspaper over a table she has scoured, and over a stove she has polished; and has prepared supper for six—well, it is rather hard to be scolded instead of praised. Minnie sobbed harder and harder.

Sarah opened the floodgates of her heart.

"A thousand times I told you not to tell Abie about the court—a thousand times. And you told him. You must have told his mother, too, because she knows. Or maybe Abie told her. You took Abie to the court to arrest his father. What devil of a child are you?"

Minnie gazed wide-eyed and started to make denial. Her mother shrieked at her to be still. Minnie turned ashen white and sobbed so hard that her small frame shook. She fell silent from exhaustion.

The two younger children played quietly to ward off their mother's wrath from themselves.

Sarah finished scrubbing the floor, then utterly worn out seated herself at the window.

"God, my God!" she thought as she gazed out upon the dingy red of the rear tenement. "Will it be like this forever? Work—slave—for what? What have we? A child like Minnie must scrub and clean, and I must go out to work for strangers. Elias is not well, Jacob must peddle papers, and yet we have not enough for shoes. And a foul tongue like the Ratkin woman's dares yet to besmirch me!" She was racked to the very depths of her being.

When Elias came home he found Minnie red-eyed, hunched up on the bed.

"What is the matter?"

Minnie burst into sobs again.

"Mama—mama, she blames me. She says I told out to Abie. I didn' do it at all. I didn' take him by the court. He was hisself." She could say no more. Elias was disturbed and puzzled. Sarah, conscience-smitten for her onslaught upon the child, read reproof in Elias's glance.

"*You* have something to say, *too!*" She rose from her seat with an infuriated look, and grabbing her shawl rushed out, slamming the door behind her. Crying all the way, she walked to Mira's.

Elias was bewildered. He shrugged his shoulders and sighed. After waiting nearly an hour for Sarah to return, he and Minnie, whom he gently asked to help him, set the table and after supper cleared and washed the dishes.

When the children were asleep and all was quiet in the home, except for the ticking of the clock, Elias seated himself at the window. He gazed out on the rear tenement now black in the darkness.

"It is hard on her," he reflected. "To-day she was by the woman to work. She is not used to such a life from home. She is a refined woman, of a good family. It is terrible. What shall I do? Will it always be like this? How hard! What a hard life!" He recalled the notion prevailing "at home" that the streets of America were paved with gold which, to own, one had only to pick up.

Across Elias's thoughts there swept a plaintive crooning from a home in the rear tenement. A woman was singing her baby to sleep.

*"America is doch a goldena Land;
Men darf nur zein sehr reich."**

He wiped the tears from his eyes.

Long after he had retired, Sarah returned accompanied by Jacob whom she had met on the street. Elias called to her saying supper had been left for both of them on the stove.

"A pretty thank you," was Sarah's sarcastic reply.

Nothing more was said, and soon the lights were turned out for the night.

XVI

To Mrs. Ratkin, whose heart bled for her *schlimasel-dicker* (unlucky) husband, an eternity seemed to elapse as she and the children waited for the doors of the court house to open. What, she wondered, keeping her eyes fastened on Abie as if to probe his soul, could so suddenly have turned him vicious enough to play his own father so foul a trick! "A healthy boy—a smart boy in school—what devil got into him!" She eased her feelings by plaguing him. He should set his hat straight, he should tie his shoe-lace, he should stand on both his feet, he should look there and not here.

At last, trembling with fear and fury, Mrs. Ratkin was facing the judge. She made her appeal in Yiddish, plus vehement gesticulations. Now and then to intensify her meaning, she had recourse to an English word or broken phrase—"boychick"—"fadder"—"lock-

* "America is a golden land;
One needs but be very rich."

hop." The "boychick" being Abie, son of the man arrested yesterday. To Mrs. Ratkin there could be only one man that had been arrested yesterday. The interpreter unravelled the complications and told her to go to the street, where her husband would join her.

A legal trick to get rid of her! She expostulated. A policeman dumped her out. Hard were Mrs. Ratkin's feelings against Columbus and his *Medena* (land); she was ready to curse and swear when, to her amazement, her spouse emerged from the court house.

He blinked. The street seemed strange, his family strangers. He displayed no sign of recognition. His odd behavior silenced even the twins, who held back from greeting him. Mrs. Ratkin looked shrivelled and aged. Her troubled eyes could make neither head nor tail of her husband. She was wretched. Abie slunk behind the group, to the side of it, wherever he could dodge observation.

They walked homeward automatically. By degrees the sense of strangeness wore off. Mr. Ratkin spoke to the twins, Mrs. Ratkin stopped to brush her husband's coat. Finally the wedded two launched upon the utmost—the culprit Abie, of whose presence the father was not yet aware.

Mrs. Ratkin asserted Abie's innocence. It was all "that Minnie, that Mendel woman's Minnie's fault." The boy could never have thought of such a thing as going to court; the girl had talked him into it, in fact, she had compelled him to go there. "Nu, how do you like such *chutzpeh* (cheek) for a mother to influence a child to do such a thing!" Mr. Ratkin was not to be easily convinced.

"I was a boy, too, nu, why did no mother's girl in-

fluence *me* to arrest *my* father? I tell you, that boy is a loafer through and through." He smacked his lips with appetite for the beating in store for the culprit.

"Itzick," Mrs. Ratkin begged, divining her husband's intentions, "I beseech you, let there be peace in the house over the Sabbath." She affected extreme weakness. "Upon my word, I have no strength to stand on my feet. Yesterday I told that Mendel woman just what I think of her and her Germankeit, and her ugly Minnie, and I aggravated myself so, I did not sleep all night. I have no strength to stand more."

The twins listening earnestly wished matters would adjust themselves, so that their parents would take heed of their august presence. The apples of their parents' eyes, they were hardly accustomed to being slighted.

There was silence. Abie thought he was missing conversation and stealing closer was spied by Itzick Ratkin, whose angry flush did not escape Mrs. Ratkin. "Hold yourself back," she shouted to her husband and in the same breath to Abie: "Run." Abie ran, and Mr. Ratkin, of necessity, "held himself back."

Abie sauntered along a few yards behind the others, his hands in his pockets, his head sunk low, his eyes fixed on the pavement. He was thinking hard. A wretched life, lickings, lickings, all the time lickings. He hated his father. Life on earth was hell. He would seek heavenly refuge under the wheels of the Madison Street cars. In the clutch of this strengthening resolve, he lost sense of his whereabouts and failed to observe that his father, as they drew nearer their home, was seeking a second opportunity. Several feet from their door he made a dash for the boy, but the mother's shriek, "Itzick!" was a timely warning to Abie, who

dodged his father's fist by the merest slice of good luck.

"God!" cried Mrs. Ratkin.

Abie ran until he was certain he was out of the danger zone, then stopping to get his bearings, he turned towards Madison Street. It was the lunch hour. He met Minnie coming from school.

Her heart pounded angrily at sight of him. Never would she speak to that liar again. Abie instantly sensed her mood. However, he did not intend to make his exodus from this world without explanation. He barred her passage.

"Get out of my way! You're a liar! You told your mama I telled you about us, and I showed you where. You're a liar!" She spoke unrestrainedly, her feminine intuition telling her she was safe from rebuff.

"I didn' said nothin'," Abie wailed in denial. "My mama, she sawn yous all gone in the Essick Market Court that day, she told my papa, I heard it wid my own ears, and my mama she said I shouldn' said nothing to you, that she sawn yous, but she did. I did *not* said you took me. All the time she blames it on me." Tears of injury gathered in the boy's eyes. Abie was weary, world weary; East Side children *do* get world weary.

The boy's tears melted Minnie's little heart. She made no reply. Automatically they walked on together.

"I'm gonna get runned over; sick of it; hope I die," Abie said as if to himself, then reasserted for Minnie's ears: "I'm gonna go and get runned over by the Madison Street car."

Minnie became alert.

"So you'll get dead."

"I don' care. I wanna."

Minnie grew penitent.

"I'll be sorry," she confessed in a low voice.

Silence.

Instead of turning the usual corner, they walked straight ahead. Abie was tired, his feet ached.

"Let's go in and sit down on the rock," he suggested. The rock was a large stone in an air-shaft, so named by the children of the neighborhood. It was big enough to hold them both. For a few minutes they sat in silence. Abie toyed with a button on his jumper; Minnie outlined the pattern of her checked dress with her forefinger.

"I wisht my papa dies, I hate him," said Abie.

A brief pause.

"You ain' gonna go by the car?" urged Minnie. Abie's suicidal intent worried her tremendously.

"So when I die, you'll be sorry?"

The tears started to Minnie's eyes. She pleaded earnestly: "Don' go by the car, Abie, then I'll speak to you my whole life."

Abie sat hunched up, his hands squeezed tight in his lap, his shoulders curved. His lips were parched, his eyes red-rimmed, his face worn and pale. He gazed into space.

"So, when I get a man," he asked after a silence, "will you marry me, Minnie?" Minnie, whose little heart went out to him in an abundance of pity, said softly and a little diffidently: "Yeh, Abie," this time without the usual proviso, "if you be a teacher."

From a window of the tenement heights a newspaper bundle came flying through the air, opening and scattering in all directions diversified rubbish, chicken guts, fish guts, plain garbage embellished with dust.

A goodly portion landed on the children's heads and in their laps. Horrified they jumped up and shook off the filth, and simultaneously turned their gaze upward.

"You dirty rotten pigs," they cried, addressing the windows, "you should go to hell and die!" Thus relieved they abandoned the air-shaft.

The factory whistles blowing one o'clock gave Minnie an awful shock. Too late for home, too late for afternoon session! Abie proposed they go to Rutgers Street Park "to sit," and Minnie consented after some persuasion. By three o'clock, when they left the Park together, Minnie's counsel had prevailed and the would-be suicide was decided to endure his domestic sufferings until he "got a man." In the hall of the front tenement they parted, promising to meet again in the evening.

* * * * *

When by twenty minutes past twelve Minnie was not yet home from school Sarah, much concerned, opened the door to listen for her footsteps. By half-past twelve she was all unstrung, and sat wringing her hands in despair. From Jacob, his mouth filled with bread and cheese, came the consoling statement that Minnie had probably been detained by the teacher to clean the blackboards, the "best girl," he explained being assigned that honor now and then.

"Would it be just at noontime?"

"*Only* at noontime," prevaricated Jacob.

Since it seemed quite plausible that the teacher had at last discovered the "best girl" in Minnie, the mother felt somewhat relieved.

Sarah was just deciding to leave her seat at the window and go watch for the child on the street when Minnie bounded in breathless and excited. Minnie im-

mediately poured out the tale of Abie's suicidal intent and her truancy. Sarah listened, with odd feelings stirring in her breast. This child of hers was queerly complex: more than a baby and more than a grandmother. Sarah sighed. Her mother's silence encouraged Minnie to lean lovingly against her.

"Ma," she said toying with Sarah's hair, "Abie and I am gonna get married when he gets a man and I am big like you."

"Go get something to eat." Sarah dropped her eyes. She was annoyed.

Minnie, though she could not understand why, sensed her mother's displeasure. In silence she cut herself a piece of bread and took a brown senile-looking banana, one of a penny "job-lot" of eleven, and began to munch it.

As for Abie, he brought tears of gratitude to his mother's eyes when he put in his appearance. There was no telling, was Mrs. Ratkin's opinion, what next such a loafer as her Abie could do, even to himself. She sent her husband a mute appeal for peace, which he respected.

So there was harmony in the Ratkin home for the Sabbath.

As a new form of punishment Mr. Ratkin refrained from talking to his son for several days. "Tell papa——" Abie would say to his mother; "Tell your son——" Mr. Ratkin would say to his wife.

XVII

The combined income of the Mendel family was not destined to bring an abatement of Sarah's worries. So many different needs had accumulated that the money

seemed to fly immediately that it came to nest. In addition Elias ailed and she herself had a constant pain in her side.

But a gentler spirit was born in the weary Sarah. Instead of her ire, Elias now roused her compassion; he seemed so dispirited and unwell. She would sit for hours at a time staring into vacancy as if to discover ways out of their distress. She never took Elias to task any more, or even rebuked the children.

One day Minnie bouncing in from the afternoon session knocked over Ida who was standing at the door shaping a sheet of newspaper into a fireman's cap. Ida, as she scrambled to her feet, besought Foxy to take vengeance for her. "Sig em!" she cried. Foxy forthwith drew himself up at attention, barked and seemed ready to carry out his Young Royalty's command. 'Bubbele stirred in her sleep.

"Ssh!" Sarah called to the belligerent trio as she tiptoed to the bedroom to peep at the baby. All was quiet. Sarah tiptoed back to her seat at the window. Foxy relaxed. Minnie went to wash her hands and Ida in need of consolation, cried sulkily, dropping the newspaper: "Ma—ma, I'm tired." She fetched a long sigh and Sarah, who saw she really looked tired, did not repel her when she climbed into her lap. Mothers of Sarah's generation have their demonstrativeness reserved for the very special occasions.

Minnie, attracted by the cosy picture Ida and her mother made, squatted on the floor beside them. Along came Foxy and sprawled himself luxuriously next to her.

"Mama, tell her to go away!" sulked Ida. Ida was not one to dismiss a grudge readily.

"Be still children!" Sarah pleaded gently.

They lapsed into silence.

Mechanically Sarah began to hum a Yiddish lullaby, rocking Ida in her arms. The children, affected by the mournful tune and their mother's unwonted serenity, listened spellbound. But soon Sarah broke off to wipe her tearful eyes.

"Ah, ma, sing some more!" coaxed Ida sleepily.

But Minnie, who had been scrutinizing her mother, interrupted with an observation:

"Uh, ma, you got gray eyes." Sarah's eyes had been her pride. She felt somewhat embarrassed. "Ain' it, mama?" urged Minnie.

"No," Sarah exclaimed with exaggerated indignation engendered by self-consciousness, "but my *hair* is gray." It seemed to Minnie that her mother held her to blame.

"Mama, your hair *ain'* gray. It's brown. Gray is white-like, ain' it?" Her mother's affirmation did not come. "Your hair is all dark like mine," continued Minnie indignantly, as she held a strand of her own hair against her mother's. Sarah seemed still unconvinced. Minnie fetched the small mirror from the wall between the windows and held it so that the faces and heads of both were reflected. "See now, ma, your hair *ain'* gray," she reiterated, feeling she had refuted the charge.

Sarah, glimpsing her sallow, haggard face in the mirror, felt her heart caught on the point of a stiletto. "At home they used to call me pretty Sarah!" she wailed inwardly.

"Put the mirror back!" she cried passionately. Minnie was startled. To her amazement her mother was crying.

"What's a madder, mama?" cooed Minnie, grieved, puzzled and penitent. She held her hands out to take Sarah's face between them. Sarah evaded the caress.

"Put it back, I tell you," she repeated.

Sarah was crying harder when Minnie came back to her side. The child was miserable.

"Mama, uh mama!" she cried impotently.

Sarah stroked her head. "Oh, my girlie, may God grant *you* better fortune!" she moaned, rocking the sleeping Ida to and fro.

Somewhere deep down in the mother's heart lived a dread that her daughter's lot would be like her own. "But," she would reassure herself, "she is an American, she will go to high school—to college—if I live to send her. Her life will necessarily be different from mine." But deep within her Sarah's soul sighed.

XVIII

At dawn next day Sarah, careful not to disturb the others, dressed and hurried to the butcher's for the Friday chicken-plucking. Elias, who rose an hour later, prepared his own coffee, and then called to Minnie and Jacob. Minnie, as she lay asleep, looked pale and pinched. Elias was glad that Sarah had dispensed with the child's assistance at the butcher's this time. It took a while before the two children began to stir in their beds. Finally Elias had to urge Minnie to hurry; there were the rolls to purchase. She stirred and complained of a headache. Five minutes later she crawled out of the cot, looking even sallow than in sleep. Elias was worried. He called Jacob and told him to go on the errand.

"Where's *Minnie*?" growled the boy, who could not allow for this deviation from the family custom.

"Minnie has a headache."

"I got a headache, too." He closed his eyes. It was characteristic of him to resort to subterfuge to gain exemption from a household task. Minnie threw an exasperated glance at his head snuggling in the pillow. She ran over, tore the pillow from under him and dashed away. Jacob was out of the bed in one bound and in pursuit. Elias intervened smiling upon both children. To restore peace he said:

"Go, Minnele, run down to the grocery. I cannot wait for Jacob to dress. I will be late."

Minnie relinquished the pillow. She finished dressing and taking five cents from her father left. When she returned, breathless as always, she was pleased to find the cots and bedding removed from the room-of-all-affairs. Assuming that her father had been the good angel, she thanked him. Truth to tell, Jacob had contributed his aid.

Elias, to Minnie's surprise, got ready to leave before eating his rolls.

"Papa," she called, "you didn' ate nothin'!"

"I did."

"But not no rolls, and you didn' ate no supper last night neither."

Jacob, who was combing his hair with the fraction of the family comb, looked from under a long wet forelock and growled disgustedly:

"Chatterbox! All the time she asks questions."

Minnie, except for a bitter look, ignored him.

"Ssh," said Elias, to forestall a quarrel, and made for the door without confessing that while Minnie was gone

he had had a spell of nausea. Minnie, too self-conscious now to insist on his eating, joined Jacob in calling out: "Good-by, pop."

The second number on the program of Minnie's daily activities took her into the bedchamber. "Get up, Ida! Get up Bubbele!" After a series of sleepy protestations the children scrambled out of bed into the room-of-all-affairs, where Minnie attended to the entire ceremony of Bubbele's dressing and to the lacing of Ida's shoes, a detail which, when it fell to Ida for execution, invariably introduced complications in the household; the laces would get irretrievably twisted, and a howl would ensue that would bring the family in a flurry to extricate her from her miseries.

Next in order was breakfast. At table Minnie apportioned the largest cruller to Jacob—a standing discrimination in his favor. When the repast was over she cleared the table, washed the dishes, instructed Ida and Bubbele how to behave until "Mama would come home from the butcher's," and finally left for school.

She made a detour to the butcher's, where she found Sarah imbedded in a mountain of feathers. Disregarding the presence of the butcher and his customers, she jumped over the sorry heap of plumage.

"Mama," she said, "papa didn' waked me till late——"

Sarah looked up in surprise from the speckled gray chicken in her lap.

"A golden child she is!" passed through her mind. "I scold her so!"—Minnie's nose still showed signs of the historic push—"and it is as if nothing happens." A tender look came into Sarah's eyes as she turned them on Minnie and said: "I do not need you. Just go to school."

Minnie stole a hasty kiss and jumped back over the mountain of feathers, which rose in a storm of protest. "Pooh, pooh!" the butcher and his customers cried, turning their heads away. The child laughed and skipped out, while Sarah looked after her lovingly, her eyes moist. The butcher gave Sarah a knowing wink.

"Some girl!"

"Yes, a girl and a half." This last proceeding from a friend of Mrs. Ratkin's, Sarah was somewhat dubious of its sincerity.

XIX

"Elias," said Sarah, one hot spring evening as she finished washing the supper dishes, "the summer is nearly here again. I cannot stand another summer of bedbugs and roaches and worms. Maybe we can take other rooms."

Elias raised his eyes from the newspaper he was reading and attempted to answer, but only brought out thick, unintelligible sounds followed by a fit of coughing. When the spell subsided, he said:

"When I cough, I get the taste of cigarettes," and added gently: "Do you think it will be better somewhere else? We cannot afford to pay much more than we are paying here, you know."

"Mira told me of two rooms on Madison Street which do not cost much and are better."

Elias resumed the perusal of his paper.

"If you can find rooms you like better, take them, my wife," he said with apparent apathy.

Sarah, always resentful of Elias's calm, which she attributed to indifference, flushed. Since the crucial ex-

perience of the arrest, however, she refrained from displays of irritation.

"I am sick of this place *without* the vermin. That housekeeper, that Mrs. Ratkin, looks at me when she sees me as if she would take my eyes out. I never have the heart to bid her even the time of day since then. And I cannot tell you how it annoys me to see Minnie run around so much with that loafer Abie. Always she is with him—with him—whenever you see her. If at least they did not quarrel, but they do."

Elias raised his eyes and said:

"Nu, where is the harm? If she does speak to him and if they do quarrel. They are children."

"Nu, yes, children. She neglects her school lessons, she is never in the house to play with her younger sisters and nothing. Anyway I do not like it."

Elias smiled at what was in the back of Sarah's mind.

"Do not be a foolish woman."

"If I am foolish, then I am foolish, that is all. But Minnie is now almost nine years old. The years fly. Soon she will be a grown-up girl. How long does it *take* for them to grow up?"

Sarah grew suddenly melancholy. A mist covered her eyes. Her thoughts travelled across the Atlantic to her free-thinker lover, and she experienced a moment of strangeness to her surroundings—to Elias—to everything of her present life. With a deep sigh she rose and automatically took the one-legged clock from the shelf over the sink and wound it, then stood for a while meditatively wiping her face on the end of her apron. After a time she said:

"I am going down to the children on the street. Shall I send you up some soda water?"

Elias raising his brows slightly but keeping his eyes lowered, replied, again apathetically, Sarah thought, and to her keen annoyance:

"If you want to."

Sarah took a cracked pitcher under her apron and left.

"I will look for other rooms," she said to herself. "He would be satisfied in a stable."

As Sarah closed the door Elias examined his handkerchief. A red stain. Blood! It had happened several times, but each time Elias had assured himself it was nothing and probably would not happen again. This time a tremor of fear shot through him. When he recovered he was glad Sarah had not seen the blood; it would have frightened her. He sighed heavily, and wearily picked up his paper again, but he did not know what he was reading.

On the way downstairs, Sarah met with a slight mishap; one of the steps gave way beneath her tread, and she fell nearly a full flight. Mrs. Ratkin, who happened to be on the floor below, spontaneously expressed concern. But Sarah, more than ever filled with disgust of the tenement, indulged once again in the luxury of unrestrained temper.

"God mine," she fairly hissed in Mrs. Ratkin's face, as if the janitress were to blame for the rottenness of the building, "a person can kill himself here. How does one live already to get out of this verminated place!" She lifted her eyes to heaven.

Mrs. Ratkin drew herself up to the dignified height of janitress.

"Nu, really, if it does not *suit* you, why do you not

move? The landlord will weep out of existence his third eye!" Going her way Mrs. Ratkin thought: "I hope they *will* move. I will tell the landlord she said they will move. She did say so—as much as said so."

Sarah realized she had committed an indiscretion. After all, she knew nothing definite about the rooms on Madison Street. Ignoring Mrs. Ratkin's sarcasm, she passed, limping slightly.

A group of children were circling round in the gutter to the rhythm of a doleful tune. On the edge of the sidewalk sat a group of women on wooden egg boxes, gossiping and watching with pride their progeny in the ring, whose voice or voices they thought to distinguish above the others. In momentary forgetfulness of their cares, they beamed with the love and pride of mothers the world over.

Sarah discerned Ida and even—yes, even—little Bubbele holding her sister's hand, and circling gracefully round and round.

"Go in and out the window—Go in and out the window——" the children's voices rang in plaintive discord.

There was an unoccupied egg box near the curb; Sarah, however, seated herself on the doorstep, thereby giving cause for whispered comment. Aloofness such as this, though inspired by a shy reticence, made Sarah out a haughty superior to Mrs. Ratkin and her followers. Woe be to him who lacks the spirit of free-masonry which must animate all who cling to the same plank in life!

"Blocking the way," grumbled Mrs. Ratkin, emerging from the house.

Sarah rose instantly, brought the egg box from the curb to the doorstep, and placing it so that it would

not obstruct the passage, seated herself. More and hotter comment gathered.

A great truck lumbering heavily, but at some speed, down the street caused diversion. Mothers shouted to their young to come in from the gutter. Ida and Bubbele, surprised to hear Sarah's voice, looked round.

"Oo, ma!" they cried running happily to her, their pace set by Bubbele whose baby legs were not always equal to their task.

Sarah wiped Bubbele's mouth and ran her fingers through her hair to straighten it. "You have spots on your dress, and pull your stockings up," she said to Ida, and next: "Where is Minnie?"

"She is wid Miss Lacey, and is gonna come right back."

Miss Lacey, a sweet young thing, the product of Upper New York's lap, had reached Minnie's ken by way of Miss Liebman. Once when Minnie had gone to Miss Liebman's home on an errand for Sarah, the young woman, attracted by her mature little ways, had engaged her in conversation. The visit resulted in Minnie's becoming eager to join a girls' club at the Queen's Daughters, a neighborhood house. Sarah objected. "Settlement" smacked of charity. Charity was the last thing Sarah aspired to for her children. But Minnie's insistence had finally wearied her into consent.

Scarcely had Ida spoken when Minnie came skipping along, flushed and happy.

"Uh, ma," she began, "Miss Lacey——" Minnie was Miss Lacey's devotee.

"Your Miss Lacey!" Sarah interrupted testily, for if Sarah had nothing else against Miss Lacey, enough that she was a Gentile. Gentiles might be good but they at-

tempted to proselytize and she preferred that her children steer clear of them. "Better go and buy your papa soda water."

With the cracked pitcher under her arm, Minnie went across the street for the two glasses of "vanilla" and returned with it still healthily sizzling. The pitcher passed from mouth to mouth for "sips." Sarah refused the cup of good fellowship much to the children's distress.

Cautioning her not to trip on the broken step, Sarah despatched Minnie to her father with the refreshing beverage.

Elias, who had quite forgotten about the proffered drink, was touched by Sarah's thoughtfulness. He rose and poured out a scanty glassful for himself and offered the rest to Minnie. She took a few sips. "Kin I take the rest to mama?" she asked.

Elias took her close to him and kissed her. "She is not like the other children," he mused wistfully as he watched her step to the door as cautiously as a tight-rope walker.

Sarah was pleased when Minnie brought the soda to her.

"She is not like the other children," thought she with mournful pride, "she is more like my family." Her heart swelled with a passionate yearning for the future welfare of her daughter, in which bitterness at her own lot was mingled. How ugly, sordid, unsuited to the gentler promise of her girlhood was her life! If Minnie's fate could only be in accord with the tradition of ease and refinement of her mother's side of the family—if only she would not marry an Elias! . . . Minnie would go through high school and through col-

lege too; here, in America, girls became teachers, doctors, lawyers; they married educated gentlemen—Minnie had a “golden head”—who could know *what* brilliant lot was in store for her! . . . Sarah’s eyes lighted on the drab tenement opposite, on the rusty fire escapes, littered with ragged, soiled bedding, on which lay babies asleep, then dropped upon the neglected children in the gutter and the long line of slovenly maternity edging the sidewalk. And she wondered miserably what Fate *really* had in store for her child.

XX

Mrs. Ratkin informed the Landlord between hems and haws—for she shivered and she shook in the presence of her Mighty Superior—that Mrs. Mendel had declared her intention of moving.

Nonchalance is unknown to the lowly. Always keyed up to a fear of the worst, Mrs. Ratkin could not understand how the Landlord, confronted with the possible loss of a tenant and of Ready Cash, remained so indifferent. He evinced not the least concern; on the contrary, he passed to other details as if he had not heard the momentous news, and departed to secure his rentals without a word of comment on Mrs. Mendel.

Uninformed Mrs. Ratkin! Her mind did not grasp the fact that her Mighty Superior, standing firmly on both legs, could afford to have a whole one removed, while she, tottering on only a fraction of a single weak leg, could not afford to have that fraction so much as threatened.

She poured out her astonishment—mingled with disappointment—to her husband.

"A man should not care a bit about his houses! I tell him Mrs. Mendel will move—so Mrs. Mendel will *move*—and he says nothing; he walks up the stairs, and *nothing!*"

Sarah made many efforts to find better rooms. Those on Madison Street recommended by Mira had the forbidding quality of costing two dollars more a month; with that increment all calculations failed to produce an equation between income and expenditure.

Though Elias was aware of her weary searches, he never inquired into the results—which did not pass unnoticed or unresented by Sarah. One Saturday she yielded to a nagging impulse to rouse him out of his lethargy. House-hunting during the week, she told him, with all her other duties, was hard for her; the family together ought to go and look on Saturdays. The inner quaking with which she put the proposal (since house-hunting might be considered an infringement of the Sabbath) was evident in her manner and brought ready consent from Elias, who was moved tenderly by his wife's new-born fractional timidity. He loved her for it.

They investigated every place displaying a "Room-To-Let" sign. But, alas, no rooms except two wretched ones in a basement were as cheap as those they occupied. At the end of the futile hunt Elias suggested that they should remain where they were. Sarah lowered her head, resentful and disheartened.

"You are always satisfied."

"Satisfied?" Elias exclaimed. "I would rather live nicer, too, my wife, but—maybe when it gets busier I will get a dollar raise. Then we can afford to pay more."

Before Elias received a dollar raise, Sarah reflected

bitterly, the bedbugs and roaches and worms and Mrs. Ratkin might commit murder upon the family; she could increase their income sooner herself. "To-morrow," she resolved, "I'll ask Miss Liebman to get me a third Lady."

But during the night Elias was very ill, and the next morning he could not go to work. Nor could Sarah. Minnie was despatched with a message to the girls. Both Sarah's and Elias's earnings for the day were lost.

The first of the following month the Landlord came for the rent, and Sarah paid it. Another month in the same rooms, with their long torturing hours of heat and pests! Sarah's heart withered at the prospect.

When Mrs. Ratkin observed that the name Mendel was missing from the list of delinquents whom she was to plague for rent during the month, she remarked to her husband, half in annoyance at still having to put up with "that Mendel" woman and half in satisfied spite that Sarah had not risen to better quarters:

"They were not on the list of the others. She paid the rent. They will stay, I suppose. A black year on them!"

XXI

"I'm gone Sunday by Cooney Island to holler all summer on a stand." This news Minnie sprang on Abie in the yard as he was intently watching the efforts of a horse-fly to free itself from between his thumb and forefinger. His attention was drawn from the fly only long enough for a casual glance at Minnie.

"Let it alone, it hurts," cried Minnie, slapping his hand. The insect, freed, flew off.

"Uh, you crazycat! Like a fly kin feel! J'ever!"

"*Sure!* It hurts."

"You *know?*" he asked skeptically. "How do you know?" Abie was not satisfied with intuition. He required pure reason.

Having nothing for proof but her imagination, which told her that a fly squeezed between two fingers must suffer pain, Minnie was silenced.

"I was by the country once and sawn lots—millions of big flies," Abie boasted. "And I tore their wings and everything——"

"I'm gone Sunday by Cooney Island to holler on a stand," Minnie repeated, trying tactfully to change the painful subject. "I'm gone for the whole summer, and——"

"It was by Brownsville. So my father took my sister and me. We picked all kind a flowers. So a girl, I gave her a scratch, so she gave me a punch, so I gave her a push, so she gave me a hack, so my father took the flowers and knocked them away." Abie paused a moment. "But he didn't holler nothin' 'bout the *flies*." Irrefutable proof that vivisection of flies was legitimate.

"Was you ever by Cooney Island?" Minnie asked, eager to escape this topic of tortured flies.

"How you gone?" The question as put, while an admission that Abie had never been to Coney Island, also expressed his skepticism as to Minnie's going. Though he had never caught her in a misstatement of fact, yet it was his way to require proof.

How Minnie came to serve as a puller-in at Coney Island was the climax of many circumstances.

In the first place, the butcher who employed Sarah

had taken unto himself another wife, with the distinct understanding that the marital compact was to include concerted interest in the business; and as the new spouse replaced Sarah at the job of plucking chickens, the Mendel income was reduced by nearly a dollar a week. Then, the bachelor girls, whose apartment Sarah cleaned on Sundays, had gone on their summer vacation for four weeks. (One man's meat is another man's poison.) Finally, Elias continued to ail. In spite of his valiant efforts to down his weakness, he was obliged every now and then to stay away from work, and so lost the day's wages. Though Elias's employer was a considerate man, he could only conform to the accepted rule in the labor market, according to which an employee is docked for absence. He, too, had to eke out a living.

Sarah was compelled to borrow, now a dollar from Mira, now from a relative. But borrowing is a sorry business. The gift of delicacy in giving is confined to the very few. Sarah was miserable.

However, in the balancing scale of human affairs, it chanced that a man and a woman, acquaintances of relatives of the Mendels, were wedded, and their union was to play a rôle in the Mendel economy.

On a day in mid-July there descended upon Henry Street and ascended upon the Mendel family ample Riva and near-skeleton Morris, the newly-weds.

Morris was a man whom idealism had emaciated. Dreaming of a college education he had worked days as assistant to a watchmaker and had studied nights. Several years of this regimen reduced him to blue glasses and the conviction that life was one Grand Damn Thing. He was meditating suicide about the time that Riva, ample of body and jovial of spirit, appeared in his board-

ing house and by some odd fate fell in love with him. Via the "Missus" of the establishment, the lure of Positive Comfort was held out to him if he would take Riva in marriage. He shilly-shallied. Marriage devoid of romance he deemed unbeautiful. But as in Riva's Coney Island stand there loomed the possible realization of his dream of a college education, he one day early in July promised for all his life to love and cherish Riva. As the season was advancing, the New Alliance, upon Morris's suggestion, decided that extra help was desirable. Someone was needed to advertise the wares, to cry: "Peanuts! Candy! Ice-Cold Lemonade!" They mentioned their needs to the aforesaid relatives of the Mendels, and promptly Minnie was proposed: "a smart girl who can holler like gold," they said.

Elias, strangely, had not yet returned from work when the New Alliance made its ascent upon the Mendels on a Wednesday evening. The part of the shop in which he spent most of his time had once boasted a window which was now boarded up because the boss felt he could not afford to replace the broken pane; it would have cost fifty cents. The work-room was a strip of space running back from two windows facing Allen Street on a level with the tracks of the elevated trains. Even the more robust of the workmen found the thundering noise and dust raised by the passing trains a hardship. By the end of each day Elias's strength was reduced to nothing. Yet he had become accustomed to the homelikeness of the place and the friendliness of the boss, and shrank from making a change. Besides, what else could he do? Eight dollars a week! And how great was the fortune to be free from harassing worry about the Sabbath!

The day had been stifling. Elias had pulled through his work only by the greatest force of will power. In the afternoon he could scarcely stand upright. At closing time, just as the boss and a young helper were leaving (Elias was always the last to go), he uttered a hysterical shriek and went down on the floor in a heap. The boss and helper ran to his aid, and workers from an upstairs shop brought remedial measures for a faint—water and vinegar. When Elias came to, he was apologetic for having caused so much trouble and worry. The boss insisted on seeing him home. At the tenement door Elias apologized for not inviting him up; he was afraid, he said, that his wife would be alarmed.

"I stayed for a chat with the boss," he explained in response to Sarah's inquiry.

As to Minnie's serving the utilitarian purpose suggested by the New Alliance, his opinion inclined neither one way nor another. He was too feeble for positive judgment. Sarah sensed apathy and was filled with resentment. "You have *some* idea," she said with slight spirit.

"Ask the child," Elias said. "If she wants to, let her go."

Minnie just then bounced in from the street. Riva was disappointed at sight of the delicate little girl. It had not crossed her mind that she would find anything but a child replica of her beefy, blowzy self—a big one, a thick one, a fat one, as she might have put it in Yiddish. However, her need for a "puller-in" was great and the pay she intended to offer was small, so she turned to Minnie with inducements. "In Cooney Island you will see it's wonderful," she said. "Punch-and-Judy shows, and music, peanuts, soda and everything." She

looked down at the child's feet and turned to Sarah. "If she will stay all summer, I'll buy her a pair of yellow shoes, and I'll present you with five dollars in advance. She can come Sunday and stay till school begins."

"Do you want to go, child?" asked Sarah.

With her thumb in her mouth Minnie mumbled: "Yeh."

The deal was closed. The New Alliance was to call for Minnie the following Sunday.

Thus Fate provided Riva and Morris with the "puller-in" for their refreshment-stand and Sarah and Elias with five dollars Cash on Delivery of their offspring, and Abie Ratkin with the surprise of surprises when a few days after she had made the announcement to his skeptical self, Minnie actually went off sandwiched between the fat Missus and the lean Mister.

XXII

Though no mention was made of the fact in the society columns of the New York press, the Mendel family, with the exception, of course, of Minnie, spent the summer at their residence on Henry Street. Great Stress, after its temporary, half-hearted absence, became again a devoted intimate.

Sarah might, perhaps, have fallen into her disagreeable ways again had not Elias continued to ail. From day to day he seemed visibly to shrink; his step to become more leaden, his face paler and paler. One evening, a few days after Minnie's departure for Coney Island, Sarah, standing beside the sink, turned unexpectedly and saw him spit blood into it. She was terrified. Had he ever spat blood before? Elias confessed.

"Woe is me!" she cried, "there are the five dollars from Riva. Go to a doctor. How does a man spit blood for months and not do something?"

Spend money for a doctor! Elias would not hear of such a thing. It would pass away, he was sure; it was only the hot weather.

But Sarah's fears were not allayed. She confided in Mira.

"If he will not spend money for a doctor" (Mira considered Elias parsimonious), "then you ought to make him stay at home some *good* day, some day when he is feeling well and not falling from his feet, and take him to the dispensary, a place where poor people are treated free by doctors."

Sarah shrank. "Poor people" recalled the Charities. She sighed with apprehension.

"Nu, what are you sighing for? It is not so terrible." There was more pity in Mira's heart than in her words.

Sarah proposed the dispensary to Elias.

"Oh, Sarah," he replied, "*zolst du gesunt sein* (thou shouldst be well), don't fill my head with such nonsense. I do not feel so sick. It will pass." He always pretended to feel better than he actually did, though several times within the next weeks he was compelled to stay away from work.

But the black cloud lost a shade of its blackness. A more successful relative learning of the Mendels' plight persuaded them to accept a loan of two dollars a week, and by the end of August Miss Liebman and her friends returned from their vacation. At the same time the hearts of Sarah and Elias were gladdened by happy postal cards from Minnie. "Thank God," Elias

remarked occasionally, "one of the children is having a pleasant time."

* * * * *

In all parts of the metropolis people succumbed from the heat. The residents of the twin tenements, the Ratkins setting the fashion, one after another—mothers, fathers, boys, girls—abandoned their rooms at night and dragged pillows and mattresses to the roof.

One night, after having partaken too freely of ice-cold lemonade (lemonade with a history in which Abie played the leading rôle), Mr. Ratkin awakened his wife who, having worked hard that day, lay beside him on the roof steeped in the slumber of the worthy.

"Wake up, wake up." He shook her. "I feel bad."

Mrs. Ratkin woke up, and soon Mr. Ratkin went to sleep—his eternal sleep.

The Mendels and other neighbors were awakened by Mrs. Ratkin's unearthly shrieks. In a few moments Itzick Ratkin was carried to his home, and within the same space of time the home became crowded with men, women, and children of every sort, size, and shape. The physician, summoned by one cooler-headed man, dispersed the crowd and upon examination pronounced Mr. Ratkin dead. The news spread like wild-fire, and the combined populace hurled itself upon the physician in incredulity. But Itzick Ratkin *was* dead. Heart failure, was the unsatisfactory explanation. How Mrs. Ratkin mourned and moaned that her husband had not at least been sick—sick, so that she could feel the justification of his dying!

* * * * *

Outside the front tenement a curious mob had gathered.

"It's a funeral," went about in whispers—a funeral variously speculated to be that of a child, a woman, an old man, an expectant young mother, a girl, and the janitress's husband.

On the fringe of the crowd stood a thin little girl, her great gray eyes wide with astonishment. What was this gathering in front of her home? Who was in that un-beautiful coffin just then being carried out of the house?

Minnie's heart stood still. Edging her way closer, she saw Mrs. Ratkin, followed by Abie, who was followed by the twins, all mourning their loss. And when the crowd thinned out, there stood Sarah Mendel with eyes red from crying. Minnie ran up to her.

"God mine, Minnie!" Sarah clutched her terror-stricken. What had brought her? Sarah could scarcely realize it was her own little child. Where had she come from so all of a sudden? She thought her safe at Coney Island.

When Riva and Morris had called to take Minnie away, Sarah, overcome by nameless fears, had been loath to let the child go and had almost, at the eleventh hour, retracted her consent. Now her imagination leapt to all sorts of horrors.

"What's the matter?" she cried. "What has happened to you? Woe is me!"

"Uh, ma, I'm so glad I'm home," sighed Minnie, snuggling in her mother's skirts as she wiped away the tears of homesickness.

XXIII

Upstairs came the explanation.

It was under the supervision, in fact, at the dictation of Riva, that Minnie had sent home the postal cards tell-

ing of her wonderful life in a whirl of Punch-and-Judy shows, which could "kill" one with the fun, and music enough to make one "deaf," and good things to eat, enough to make one "burst."

The truth was, that while the Riva-Morris residence consisted of one whole room (rented for the season), in which they occupied the one real bed, Minnie's share in it was the floor softened by a few old coats, a sofa cushion, and a strip of cheese-cloth. Here, in the dead of night Minnie shed her honest tears of homesickness. Oh, how homesick she was! Her homesickness had begun the very moment the Henry Street tenement was out of sight. And how the weeks had intensified it! The few times the Alliance had found her crying they reminded her that five dollars for her services were already in her mother's keep and that yellow shoes and a dress in prospect were not to be despised. Perhaps had Minnie guessed how she was missed at home she would have made her escape regardless of these considerations. But little did she know that five minutes after she had left, Bubbele insisted that Minnie ought to be there to comb her hair, and Ida sulked on general principle, while when Elias returned from work the home seemed terribly empty to him; and Jacob at bedtime thought it was "funny kind a to lock the door without not Minnie being in."

Abie too had missed her. He approached Ida and at the point of a wooden gun insisted on information as to when her big sister would be back. But Ida was a "dunce;" a year and a day were the same to her. Gee!

In time he tackled Sarah. It was one day after his discovery of the Great Blessing.

On East Broadway a man hauled a wooden box out of a basement. Abie, passing, saw and became curious. He waited for the man to descend, then cautiously peeped into the box. Oh, joy! lemons! speckled lemons, to be sure, some more speckled than other, but lemons nevertheless. He collected a few and was about to make off when the man reappeared, and so frightened him that the fruit fell from his hands.

"Gu het, take 'em, little boy," said the man. "You can come every day and take some."

After that the Ratkin family regaled themselves daily with the delicious drink made from the "good" parts of the lemons, and Mr. Ratkin began to see a redeeming feature in his son, little dreaming that Abie's lemons were to be his undoing.

Returning one day with lemons galore, Abie, meeting Sarah, had an inspiration. He held out two, "good" sides up. "I got em for nothin'," he said as an inducement, because Sarah looked ready to refuse. "How?" asked Sarah. "From a man who knocks them away." Elias had been ill that day; he had stayed away from work; cold water, lemon and sugar—"Er wet sich upchapen die harz," (be refreshed) thought Sarah. She took the lemons and hid them under her apron. Her back was already turned. Abie's courage took fire. "When is Minnie comin' back, Mrs. Mendel?" he asked.

A swift change in the state of Sarah's heart toward her benefactor. "Nu, loafer," she said turning upon him, "is it *your* business? When she will come back, she will come back. You need someone to quarrel with maybe?"

"Fresh thing!" grumbled Abie, lamenting the waste of his lemons.

As Saturdays and Sundays were the busiest days in Coney Island, the Riva-Morris corporation prepared an extra quantity of home-made lemonade on Fridays. It was a calamity, therefore, when one Friday evening the stick with which Riva compounded the savory beverage in a wooden wash-basin disappeared. Tears of vexation came to Riva's eyes as she bent her profuse body to hunt in all corners of the cluttered room. Minnie had to crawl under the bed while she rummaged in the disorder of the bed itself, then had to help her shove packages, boxes and furniture from place to place, and finally was sent to ask the landlady if she had seen the stick. "Maybe Morris put it away," suggested Minnie on returning from the landlady. But the frantic Riva would not wait for Morris. She had another solution. She rolled her sleeves up and made her arm do the rotatory work of the stick.

Now Sarah and Elias were agreed about one thing; that Minnie's sensitive stomach was an inheritance from her father. "The least thing makes her sick," Sarah often complained. The sight of Riva's dirty sweaty arm immersed in the lemonade—lemonade that people, Minnie knew, would be drinking—lemonade such as she herself had partaken of many times, turned her sick. She retched and vomited.

Riva conveniently diagnosed her trouble as sea-sickness—for were they not close to the ocean? She offered her a drink of the lemonade.

Horror of horrors!

"I don't want the lemonade."

"Why not?"

"Because it's dirty."

Wailing wall of Jerusalem! Whatever possessed the

child to say so! Her answer brought down upon her head a deluge of abuse. She received it in silence.

The next day Riva noted that Minnie omitted lemonade from her verbal advertisement of the refreshments. "Doesn't it suit you to call lemonade too?" she demanded angrily.

"It's dirty."

"*What's* dirty?"

"You stucked your hand in it."

From the slops of the East Side comes this impudent brat to tell Riva that her hand is dirty! The Alliance was overcome with fury. The following day Minnie was shipped home, Morris putting her on the car and instructing the conductor where to let her off.

"It's nearly the end of the season anyway," Riva said to Morris, rejoicing in the secret recesses of her heart that she would save the money for the shoes and the dress.

XXIV

Elias awoke very ill the night following Mr. Ratkin's death. Sarah felt his temples and concluded his was a case of "hot head," which is *the* manifestation of illness to our tenement friends and the forerunner of the worst evil. Sarah grew excited. He must have a doctor, was her firm decision, and she would summon one the very first thing in the morning. A crisp two-dollar bill was in her possession, more than enough in those days when a physician demanded fifty cents a visit.

Mira dropped in at seven o'clock the next morning to ask if Sarah cared to go with her to a store on Hester Street where cracked eggs were to be had for "next to

nothing." Sarah told her of Elias's condition. Indeed, he must have a doctor was also her verdict; and she went right down and brought back a Doctor Levin, who had saved the life of one of her neighbor's children when another physician had given the case up as hopeless.

Elias could not be cured of his lung trouble, said Doctor Levin, unless he went to the country for six months.

Elias sick with lung trouble! Sarah, Minnie, Ida, Bubbele, Jacob stood awestruck. This that they had heard could not possibly be!

But Mira had her own opinion in the matter. "The country is a hospital maybe?" she asked, measuring Doctor Levin with a look.

"Yes, a hospital in the country."

Did not Doctor Levin see that Elias was a father of children; that his presence on earth was necessary, and for purposes of "practicing" the hospital could find itself *another* man? Mira pursed her lips defiantly; her red knob of hair quivered.

The wise East Sider, convinced that a hospital is an establishment which snatches up the bodies of the poor to practice upon, will no more agree to send a patient there than he will agree to have him buried alive. Lacking Sarah's, or Itzick Kramer's, or Schmucl Rothenberg's experience with the Peoples Charities, physicians have failed to discover how these people come by their belief.

Doctor Levin, a young man new in his profession, disposed of Mira with one contemptuous look; then pleaded with Elias to believe that nothing but a long rest in the country would save him, and advised him to go just as soon as arrangements could be made for his admission.

Sarah and Elias were impressed by Doctor Levin's

evident sincerity. Sarah, accompanying him to the door followed by Minnie, thanked him, and asked distractedly, as if speaking to herself:

"Woe is me, how does an otherwise perfectly healthy and strong man become so sick all of a sudden?"

Doctor Levin flashed round upon her in youthful amazement.

"How? By living against all the laws of nature."

His words, solemn and ominous, remained with Minnie the rest of her life.

For a few days Sarah found herself with scarcely a moment in which to give any particular thought to Elias, who as it happened felt somewhat better. She cooked for Mrs. Ratkin, washed for her, cleaned her home, fed her children and provided consolation. The janitress was sadly broken down; she could not pull herself together. The tenants had even to take over her janitor's work. Of all the neighbors Sarah did the most. She had an ailing husband—"of course, Elias would not *die* from his sickness, but——" And nothing so softens us toward our fellows as to see them visited by a catastrophe that may befall us, too.

A week later a brother of Mrs. Ratkin turned up, and the family moved away.

XXV

After the Ratkins' departure Minnie was left much to herself. She was lonely; she missed Abie. And she missed Foxy, who had gone on his transmigratory way. Poor Foxy! At his wits' end for something to eat he had gorged upon some refuse in a neighboring air-shaft and the next day departed this life.

One afternoon Minnie tried to forget her loneliness in a game of school with a dozen pieces of coal for pupils set in a row on the lounge against the wall. Withdrawing a foot or two and using a stick as a ruler she pointed to the first pupil.

"Spell cat," she ordered. No answer. "Spell cat." Still no answer. A stupid pupil! She passed on to the next. The first piece of coal fell over. The teacher raised the pupil and told her to behave; as she turned to the next pupil the first fell over again. The teacher frowned and compressed her lips in exact imitation of her own teacher. Placing one hand on her hip and raising the ruler, she dealt the naughty pupil a sharp rap. Something impertinent came in reply. The teacher looked at the pupil and repeated in Doctor Levin's very tone of amazement: "How? By living against all the laws of nature!" She waited as if to give time for the idea to sink in, then repeated: "By living against all the laws of nature!"

Sarah entered with the purchases for the evening meal. Coal on the lounge! Didn't Minnie know that coal spoiled a lounge. There now, never mind, Minnie should begin at once to prepare supper; she herself had to go right out again to Mira.

Sarah's object in hurrying to Mira was to obtain that sage's sanction for Elias to go to the hospital. Elias, who had got much worse, had consulted Doctor Levin again and was now waiting to be sent to the country: indeed, he was eager to go. A heavy cloud hung over Sarah. Mira's denunciation of the country rang an ill omen in her heart. Mira knew so much about everything. What if Elias would get still worse in the country? But perhaps if the sage were told of how eager

Elias was to go, she would approve. Sarah would also tell her of a cheap room she had found in a basement on Madison Street—one room would be enough for them if Elias were away; of her plans for doing a little extra work—peddling perhaps; and of a job Minnie had secured—taking care of the butcher's twins at five cents an afternoon. They could struggle through six months. If only Elias would get better!

Mira, however, was not to be shaken from her opinion of "countries;" a hospital was a hospital, country or no country, and a hospital was a slaughterhouse.

On the way back home, Sarah tremblingly decided to talk the matter over again with Elias. If Mira held to her conviction so unwaveringly, maybe—maybe there was more to it than they understood. She sighed once, twice, thrice—no strict account can be kept of sighs in Sarah Mendel's world.

Scarcely had she reached home when Doctor Levin came bringing the notice of Elias's admission to the sanitarium and before she had a chance to voice her fears Elias himself entered and seemed so glad that she had not the heart to discourage him with Mira's ideas. Sarah, he said, would see, *mer zu Shem* (God willing), he would come back better than he had ever been.

The following Tuesday Elias went away.

A week later Sarah was notified that Elias was very ill, and she must come at once. Pneumonia had developed from a severe cold.

Sarah could have torn the flesh from her body as at Elias's bedside in the sanitarium she watched his labored breathing and noted the fearfully emaciated face with a red patch on each sunken cheek; his fevered tossing, the heaving of his flat chest; the gaze of his eyes as he

opened them and looked unknowingly at her. Mira had been right. They must have been "practicing" upon him. She followed each movement of the doctor and nurse like a spy; she strained every nerve to understand what they were saying. When Elias moaned as they moved him, she could have shrieked.

Mira, as soon as she heard that Sarah had been summoned, went to the hospital out of an impulse compounded of curiosity, a desire to help, a desire to console, and eagerness to get in her "I told you so."

Sarah shrank and cowered when Mira appeared. From the narrowed keen little blue eyes and compressed thin lips, she read the opinion to which Mira would hold forever: "Sarah was to blame. No sensible woman would have let her husband go to a country. Country, schmuntry! A *hospital*, that's what it was." However, Sarah's look of misery restrained Mira's tongue and turned her intended taunt into words of consolation: Sarah should hope for the best.

"Woe is me!" Sarah cried, "if only he comes back alive, I will be content with bread and water the rest of my life."

Mira had come to the hospital not merely to stand around; she had come to be of use, so that when the physician was about to administer a hypodermic, she told him to substitute a glass of whisky. Sarah, convinced by Mira's confident manner that the glass of whisky was the one thing that would save Elias, eagerly seconded the request. The doctor, anxious to do his best for Elias, tried to explain that the hypodermic and not whisky was what Elias needed. But Mira, only the more emboldened by his indulgent tone, let out a torrent of abuse. The physician, in his impotence to convince

these two ignorant women, ordered them roughly to mind their own business—indisputable proof that the unfortunate Elias was being practiced upon, slaughtered. Sarah and Mira turned ashen.

In the chill hours of the dawn Sarah sat swaying to and fro, clutching at her hair in an agony of grief. She was a murderess, a murderess, a murderess, she told herself over and over.

Elias had passed away that night.

PART II
THE CELLAR

PART II

THE CELLAR

CHAYIM SCHLOPOBORSKY kept a shoe repair shop in a cellar on Madison Street. In the rear was a room intended, according to the architectural plans, for the living room. As Chayim Schlopoborsky was obliged to live with the greatest economy, it occurred to him one night, as he fought for sleep against the noise of the passing street cars, that he might move his lounge, table, chair and stove from the back room to the shop, partition part of the shop off with a curtain, and live and work in the shop. The rear room he could then rent out. Such a room he felt ought to bring him five dollars a month. The following day he made his inspiration known to the Swedish janitor, who, lame in the use of the Yiddish language, had difficulty in understanding. However, once he did understand, he smiled approvingly; it was a brilliant idea; "Smart!" he cried, pointing to his forehead and went off for a room-to-let sign for Chayim Schlopoborsky to display in his window.

A few days after Elias had gone to the sanitarium, Sarah, carrying out their plan for greater economy, moved with her four children into Chayim Schlopoborsky's cellar.

* * * * *

Chayim Schlopoborsky, with a heart not altogether of stone, had sympathy for Sarah in her bereavement and pitied the orphaned children. However, after the first

flush of sympathy wore off and the loud talking and wailing in Sarah's quarters annoyed his customers, he was obliged to remonstrate. Thereafter, Sarah wept more softly and so did the children. Relatives and friends, too, were restricted to modulated lamentations. "The man next door from whom we have this room rented is a bad one," Sarah would say with a warning finger to her lips.

* * * * *

In her stupefaction after Elias's death, Sarah lost all concern for the future. She gave up her work of charring and her new business of peddling candles on Friday mornings, and even neglected her housework. While Mira busied herself for the home and the children, she sat idle, wringing her hands, crying lamentations, bemoaning Elias's fate and the fate of her children.

A full month passed and Sarah still suffered herself to be supported by relatives, who began to think she was a little too indifferent about her dependence. A week later some began to whisper that she was being "spoiled" then that she had "*chuzpeh*" (cheek). Finally there was only one left who still had faith in her. "She is stunned. When she comes to herself, we shall be able to reason with her," he declared. Four weeks more passed, yet Sarah gave no sign of waking up to the hardship that her dependence imposed upon her relatives. "As if," they said boldly now, "she does not know that for us to give fifty cents, one dollar, two dollars, is like tearing off our skin for her." A little later they cried indignantly: "Let her go to the Charities if she can't do for herself—but let her have mercy on *us*! We are poor too."

"We cannot propose it," the one of faith said, "she is

no beggar from home. When she comes to herself she will see our hardship and will go to the Charities of her own accord."

One more week, then the relatives unanimously decided to see to it that Sarah *was* roused. Mira was delegated to do the rousing.

Sarah had forgiven, but she had never forgotten Mira's superior attitude on their pilgrimage together to the Charities, so that now when Mira mentioned going to the Charities for monetary aid, she turned upon her with a storm of abuse. Poor, mistaken Sarah! She saw in Mira a conspirator with Fate.

"She all but threw me out of her house," said Mira to each of the relatives. "When I told her it was no plan to sit round and let others—poor, too, even if they are blood ties—support her, she nearly ate me up alive." To the one staunch relative she added caustically: "For *that* she is enough herself. For that she is not so stunned. I did not say that she should go to work. I know she is not enough herself for that; but to go to the Charities—she can do that!"

The relatives decided to withdraw their support. Only two dollars from the one faithful relative came to Sarah the next week.

XXVII

It was a bitter cold Saturday morning. Sarah sat with her children huddled about a tiny coal stove, in which a few pieces of wood were burning low. In the home there was not a scrap of food.

"Uh, mama, I'm hungry," wailed each of the three younger children.

Sarah's glassy eyes filled with alarm. But when the cry was repeated, her alarm put up the shield of anger, and she reprimanded them, at first gently, then more harshly.

"I will go get something to eat right away. Meantime be still. It is not so terrible that you should be without food once." Sarah knew not what she was saying.

A long glassy stare, then a look of dawning resolution. It was Saturday; Miss Liebman would be at home. She would go and ask to do the girls' cleaning that day instead of Sunday and explain her absence of the past weeks. If the pain in her side would only let up! To test herself she rose from her chair and crossed the room. At the other end she sank into a chair, so sharp and intense was the pain.

"Ma—ma, I'm hungry." This time it was Jacob, who until then had not complained. A tear quaked on each lid, the corners of his mouth were drawn, and he scratched his head helplessly.

The girls glanced furtively from Jacob to their mother. Sarah with the look of a terror-stricken animal rose swiftly, regardless of the pain in her side.

"Go," she cried to Minnie, "go in the back way of the old groceryman on Henry Street and ask him to give you bread and a herring. Tell him your papa died and your mama has no money." Though the store was closed on Saturday, the grocer occasionally transacted business through the back entrance.

Minnie rose simultaneously with the command, so compelling was Sarah's demeanor.

"You go along," Sarah said to Jacob, who never be-

fore obeyed a command so instantly. There was something startling in Sarah's look.

The other children huddled closer to the stove. Sarah sat with drooping shoulders, irresolutely twining and un-twining her fingers, a picture of abject despair. "Woe is me, what has been the matter with me that I let it come to this? I could have worked. Woe is me!" she thought over and over again.

The relatives *had* succeeded in rousing Sarah!

* * * * *

Chayim Schlopoborsky opened the Mendels' door without the ceremony of knocking.

"Mrs. Mendel, you are really a respectable woman and you have your great troubles, but I am a poor man too. I must have my five dollars' rent. I have been waiting already over a week."

Chayim Schlopoborsky did, indeed, have his own troubles. Six months previously he had gone through the horrors of a pogrom, in which he had lost one child and both his parents. The height of his ambition was to bring over his family of wife and six children; in the little Russian town they waited eagerly for his summons to the Land of Freedom.

While the miserable Mendels hugged their feeble little stove in the back room, Chayim Schlopoborsky sat on his stool in the front shop cogitating:

"*Mir is als bashert!* (everything must happen to me!) Nu, if she has no money to pay the rent, let her go to the Charities. I am not rich enough to keep her for nothing. I have my own troubles."

To do Chayim Schlopoborsky justice, he was ignorant of the exact state of affairs in the Mendel home. What

he did know exactly was that he was five dollars short of the passage money for his wife and babies.

Sarah looked at the shoemaker dumfounded. She was about to explain that in a few days she would get money for work and would pay him, but Chayim mistook the expression on her face for an appeal.

"I am poor too," he said, "if you have no money, go to the Charities. Rich people give money there. I cannot afford to be a philanthropist."

Sarah, the look of a hunted beast leaping into her eyes, jumped from her chair. In a burst of impotent rage she grabbed up one of the children's school books and hurled it at the shoemaker. It struck him on the head. She followed it with another book, then with a knife and then with a fork. The man shrieked. People passing on the street, stopped to listen. The Swedish janitor ran in just in time to tear another implement from the violent Sarah's hand.

"A regular devil she is!" Chayim Schlopoborsky shouted, making for the door and slamming it shut behind him.

XXVIII

The sky hung gray over the metropolis; heavy clouds drifted cumbersomely in layers across the melancholy expanse. It began to drizzle.

A husky expressman, humming a lively air from a Yiddish operetta, carried the Mendel belongings from their basement shelter to the sidewalk. The last piece deposited, he removed a plate from the inside of the coal stove, in which he had placed all the dishes, set it on top of the stove, and laid a ten-cent piece on its

yellowish, cracked surface. Then he looked down into the basement. None of the Mendels were to be seen. Wiping the perspiration from his large, red face, he slapped on his cap, thrust his hands into his pockets, and sauntered off, keeping step to the tune of the Yiddish operetta.

The rain came down on the Mendel belongings.

After a time Sarah, as if stealthily, emerged from the basement. She was dry-eyed, with the haunted expression that had settled upon her face. The three girls, crying, followed.

The street was deserted. The children looked up at Sarah. Her eyelids fluttered. She glanced at the furniture and wrung her hands, then turned away.

"Go, children," she said in a hard voice, "stand inside the vestibule so you do not get drenched." The children made no move. "Go, children, wait there until I come back. I am going away."

"Where you gone, mama?" Minnie asked in terror.

Sarah in her trials had often threatened to throw herself into the river.

"I am going to the Charity place to see the Lady."

"Don' go, don' go, mama!" the child cried, certain her mother intended to do something desperate.

"Go up on the stoop, you hear?" Sarah raised her voice.

"Lemme go along wid you," Minnie pleaded, rubbing her tears away with the back of her little hand.

Sarah threw her a commanding look. Minnie led the children up the stoop into the vestibule. Sarah drew her shawl close about her rigid body and walked down the street.

On the Saturday of the attack on Chayim Schlopobor-

sky, immediately after Minnie and Jacob had returned from the grocer, Sarah in spite of her pain had set out to call on Miss Liebman. Repeated ringing of the door-bell had brought no response. From the janitor she learned that the girls had moved away, where he did not know. So she decided to go to the Charities to see her. But the next few days the pain in her side was so intense that she went instead to Mrs. Finkelstein, who lived nearer, only to hear from the maid that the lady was taking a six weeks' rest at a winter resort.

What Sarah in her desperation might have attempted had not the sympathetic relative called that same evening and left her five dollars, is hard to say. She immediately offered the shoemaker three dollars. He refused to accept it. He had vowed "that regular devil" should be thrown out. As the janitor more than agreed with him that Sarah was not one devil but one and a half devils, and the landlord was an open-minded man, Sarah was served with a dispossess notice the significance of which she failed to realize and so was wholly unprepared for the eviction that followed close after.

When she reached the Charities building it was nearly five o'clock. Somehow she could not muster the courage to go in; she waited on the street for Miss Liebman. After half an hour of strained expectancy, with frequent eager glances at the door each time it opened, she begged a boy to go in and ask Miss Liebman to come out. The boy brought back word that Miss Liebman no longer worked there and that there was no one then in the office who knew her whereabouts.

It is in such moments as these that we throw up our hands and run either to or from God. Sarah looked up to the heavens and denied God.

She stood stark. Then she faced about and walked homeward, slowly, with bowed head.

On the sidewalk in front of her whilom home she found Jacob standing by the furniture looking mystified. As he had gone straight from school to hawking newspapers, the eviction was a surprise to him.

"What's a madder, mama?" he asked, but received no reply, as Sarah who had glanced into the vestibule, missed the children. They were not where she had left them. At that moment the vestibule door flung open and Minnie came running out.

"Uh, ma," she cried happily, "Mrs. Block upstairs made us come up by her house."

Though Sarah swiftly gathered that a neighbor had offered hospitality, she stared idiotically.

"Mama, she said I should make you come up, too."

"Go upstairs," said Sarah, addressing both Jacob and Minnie.

"You come too," pleaded Minnie.

"Go—go alone——" Sarah pushed Minnie gently backward. A great lump was in her throat. She felt her self-control slipping away.

"You come, too."

"Go!" Sarah shouted, and turned her eyes to the furniture.

A passing man noticed the group and the furniture; he stopped, mumbled something, and deposited a coin on the collection plate.

"Do you *hear* me? Go, you bloodsuckers!" yelled Sarah, bereft of her reason.

The two children turned upon their heels.

Sarah clutched at her heart with her cold, moist hand.

She looked up at the heavens, then down at the basement, and she vowed vengeance upon—CHAYIM SCHLOPOBORSKY.

XXIX

The children had waited patiently in the vestibule, watching the drizzle turn into a downpour. Two people passed and left coins in the collection plate; another walked by rapidly, apparently too bent upon his own affairs to answer the call of another's need.

Presently the vestibule door opened. An elderly woman emerging brushed past the children and descended the stoop.

"Oigh wei!" Mrs. Block cried from the bottom step; looking back at the children: "Is this your furniture?"

"Yeh," Minnie stuck her thumb in her mouth.

Mrs. Block was all excited pity. "Where is your mama? Woe is me!" she cried, wringing her hands and running back up the steps.

"She wen' away," Minnie said. Ida and Bubbele began to cry. They were cold and sleepy.

"Mein Gott! Mein Gott! Do not stand here." The woman pushed them into the hall. "Come upstairs with me."

Taken so suddenly, the children did not resist, though Minnie had her qualms about Sarah and Jacob.

"Mother mine, mother mine!" the woman muttered when she had got the children in her home and bustled about, drying them, brushing their hair, kissing and petting them.

It was while they were being regaled with bread and cocoa that Minnie ventured to say:

"My mama might be downstairs and my brother maybe came too. I wanna go down and see."

"Yes, bring them both up," Mrs. Block repeated three times.

When Minnie returned bringing Jacob but not Sarah and told their hostess that her mother refused to come, Mrs. Block picked up her shawl and said she would go down herself.

"Uh, I'm so glad! She'll come if you go," cried Minnie.

When the door closed upon the hostess, Jacob growled:

"Chatterbox! Makes me sick! Always she got to go and say!"

Jacob's harshness at this particular time was unbearable.

"Shut up!" cried Minnie. "You don't care, yeh, if mama stays out the whole night in the rain or not." Though Minnie had explained to him on the stairs that they had been "knocked out cause mama didn't pay the rent," it had not occurred to Jacob that the horrid business would last through the night. He was struck to the heart. To evade Minnie, he turned to spin a top for Bubbele, a toy Mrs. Block had taken away from a boy in the street to punish him for having struck her foot with it.

Sarah was in the vestibule weeping when Mrs. Block appeared.

"By standing here and crying you are not helping your children. Do not forget you are a mother of children."

A man stopped and deposited a penny in the plate.

Sarah's body quivered from head to foot as from a

chill. She followed Mrs. Block into the hall and up the dark stairs.

XXX

Mrs. Block did everything to cheer Sarah and put her at her ease. She seated her on the most comfortable chair, removed her shawl, placed Bubbele on her lap, talked, laughed, bustled. "And now," she said finally to the children, "say what you want for supper—salmon, cheese or herring or sardines?" For all her coaxing, they remained non-committal. She went down and brought back salmon *and* cheese *and* herring *and* sardines, as well as horse-radish and sponge cake for her husband.

Mr. Block was a gentle, kind-looking man, whose slow manner distantly recalled Elias. He greeted his unexpected guests with friendliness, immediately suspecting their relation to the furniture on the street.

Supper, served on a regular even if coarse set of dishes, was a silent meal. The hosts were occupied with conjectures and plans for their guests, while Sarah, in her misery, battled against rising tears. When the children ventured to whisper, she hushed them up.

After supper, Mr. Block played with Bubbele on his knee, and the other children gathered round him, laughing at the way he danced the child up and down. For a while it seemed as if there were peace in the hearts of all.

"How would it have hurt us to have had a dozen such?" Mr. Block asked his wife.

Mrs. Block, who was childless, smiled as she met Sarah's eyes.

"Their father lives?" Mr. Block asked Sarah.

Ere the evening was over the Blocks learned a goodly portion of the Mendel history. But Sarah kept secret the story of the disciplining relatives and Chayim Schlopoborsky's iteration of their advice.

"When a woman finds herself in your position in this country," said Mr. Block weightily, "there is no reason, nevertheless, why she should go under. There are charity places. If you do not want to apply yourself, someone else can do it for you. It is not so terrible even if it is bad; the years will fly, the children will grow up, they will go to work. It is not so terrible." His expression belied his words. Sarah gulped, dropped her eyes and said nothing.

Mrs. Block, whose sympathetic heart was torn by Sarah's evident wretchedness, proposed they get ready for bed. Bubbele yawned and rubbed her sleepy eyes. The rain pelted dismally against the window.

"Itzick," Mrs. Block said, "this rain is enough to drown the furniture. What do you say to going down and putting a sheet over it?"

Mr. Block took the torn sheet and went down. Returning he energetically set to work to maneuver sleeping space for their guests.

Soon everyone was in bed and the home dark. The rain came down with still greater force. Hailstones rattled against the panes, and it began most unseasonably to thunder and lighten.

"Nebich!" Mr. Block whispered to his wife, who wiped her eyes and sighed.

"To-morrow, the first thing in the morning," she said, "I will help her look for one or two rooms, and on your way to work you better leave a letter at the Charities

asking them to come. Herself she will not go. I could see it in her eyes. We will ourselves lay out the few dollars for the moving and the rent deposit and for a little for them to eat."

"Yes, I will do like I did for the man in my shop—leave a letter; they attend to it just as well."

At a vivid flash of lightning, Mr. Block left his bed and fastened dark shawls over the lower halves of the windows. Passing his little guests he whispered to them to "sleep" and playfully pinched Minnie's nose telling her that her gray eyes shone like diamonds in the dark. The children, to Sarah's annoyance laughed.

* * * * *

Before the others awoke the next morning, Mr. Block, using the wooden seat of a chair as a desk, indited a letter in the Yiddish to the Peoples Charities. He wrote dramatically of the condition of the widow Sarah and her four children, penniless, with the sidewalks of New York as their only home. "Out of pity and as a service to God," he concluded, "my wife and I took them in for the night."

On his way to work he delivered the note.

While Mrs. Block was putting the bedroom in order, Sarah snatched the opportunity to admonish the children.

"Be careful of everything. Don't touch anything. Don't break anything. Remember this is the home of strangers. . . . Minnie, and you, too, Jacob, don't come back for dinner at twelve o'clock; it will be too much trouble for Mrs. Block." Minnie and Jacob looked gloomy at the prospect of a fast. "Nu, don't carry on," Sarah warned them. "It won't hurt you to do without dinner." Sarah looked so pale and her upper lip twitched so that the children suffered at the sight of her.

Minnie moved intending to caress her mother. Sarah held her off. "You go to the butcher's children right after school; the five cents will come in handy." To Jacob: "You come home; don't waste a minute after school; if I find rooms, you will have to help me carry the furniture." At last they had permission to leave for school.

"Do you think we should take the children along when we look for rooms?" Mrs. Block, emerging from the bedroom, asked Sarah.

Sarah shrugged her shoulders. She looked so tired and worn that Mrs. Block thought she had better not be encumbered with the babies. "Let them stay at home quietly and play and we will make greater speed."

Sarah put the children down in the middle of the room, again admonishing them not to touch a single thing.

"I have no diamonds and pearls in my house," said Mrs. Block. "Let them play with everything if it amuses them."

In the dark hall Sarah chose the darkest spot to ask Mrs. Block:

"Do you think they will accept a one-dollar deposit if we find a room or two?"

Poor Sarah! One dollar was all she had, and she feared to go on a useless expedition.

Mrs. Block, certain of reimbursement by the Charities, said:

"My dear Mrs. Mendel, don't be a child. Whether five dollars is with me or you, what does it matter? I will lay it out for you, and when God will grant you better times, you will give it back to me." In her heart she thought: "God, what a pig a person is compelled

to be! If I were not sure that the Charities would give it back to me, I simply could not afford to offer it to her."

Sarah, blinded by tears, stumbled down the dark stairs. On the street she turned livid at the sight of the furniture. Mrs. Block hurried her away.

For three hours the women hunted. They scrambled up rickety stairs and down into basements. Not a single place was to be had for five dollars a month.

Nearly noon time, disheartened and tired, they faced each other helplessly on the street. The rings under Sarah's eyes were black; her face was drawn and sallow. She held her hand to her right side. Mrs. Block decided to stop house-hunting.

"If worse comes to worse," she said as they entered her rooms, "you and the children can stay with us another night."

Mrs. Block compelled Sarah to lie down on the lounge. Wearily Sarah turned her head toward the wall and closed her eyes.

"Ssh!" Mrs. Block whispered to the children still playing on the floor.

Sarah sat up.

"Be quiet!" she commanded harshly, "don't disturb Mrs. Block."

"No, no," Mrs. Block cried, "I was thinking only of you. They do not disturb me a bit." She was alarmed by Sarah's wild appearance. "Go to sleep, see, do me a favor," she begged, and forced her guest down on the lounge. She feared for Sarah's reason.

Sarah lay down again. The children were still as mice.

Elias was reading aloud from the newspaper—Jacob

was studying his lessons, his geography on his lap and ink on the floor. The teakettle sang on the stove—Minnie was sweeping the fine, large room-of-all-affairs of Henry Street. Mrs. Ratkin was saying to her how nice and companionable her Abie and Minnie were——

Sarah was startled from her dreams by the creaking of the floor as Mrs. Block moved across the room. She sat bolt-upright, her hair disheveled, her eyes staring. She could not remember after her fifteen minutes' doze, where she was, then she cried in extreme distress: "It must be terribly late. I must go at once to look for rooms."

"Nu, nu, don't be excited," the good Mrs. Block begged. "You will eat dinner first and the children will come right away for dinner from school. After that there will be time enough to look for rooms."

Sarah protested, rising and arranging her hair. "The children are not coming from school anyway," she said, "I told them not to. Bubbele and Ida will have enough with a piece of bread. I do not want anything."

Mrs. Block changed color.

"Fui! fui!" she cried, "to let your own children rather do without food than trouble a strange woman a little bit! With a real mother's heart you could not do that!" Mrs. Block really meant to shame Sarah. "A mother should rather trouble a whole world than sacrifice the tip of her child's pinky——"

A rap at the door interrupted the sermon. Sarah's mind was in a whirl—dinner, pinky, sacrifice, Elias, the teakettle——

The Charities investigator was admitted. When the young woman made known her mission Sarah seemed to turn into marble; she stood rigid, ashen white, be-

wildered. Mrs. Block was terrified into an immediate admission of what her husband had done.

"With a real mother's heart" rang in Sarah's brain, "a woman should trouble a whole world rather than sacrifice the tip of her child's pinky——" Something snapped in her being: her hold on herself gave way. She dropped on the lounge and delivered herself up to the mercy of the investigator.

Bubbele and Ida came to lean against their mother and to scrutinize the visitor. And the investigator, whose privilege it is to disregard the sacredness of privacy, probed into every nook and cranny of Sarah's existence. While waiting for answers she now and then took notice of the children.

"You're a pretty little girl but your hands are very dirty," she said to Bubbele.

Bubbele looked hard at her baby fingers.

"Water is very cheap."

Bubbele and Ida looked up at their mother as if to see whether she felt the same way about it.

Bubbele's hands *were* dirty; she had been playing several hours on the floor. Sarah, who wanted to say so, merely squirmed on the lounge.

"Have you any relatives?"

"Yes, a few on my husband's side."

"Give me their names and addresses."

Sarah gave them.

"En—en Tante Mira——" piped Bubbele.

Sarah smiled down upon the baby and patted her cheek to silence her. She felt self-conscious and timid and mortified.

"Who is Tante Mira?" The investigator was on the alert.

"She is no relative ; only a compatriot."

She would make sure of that herself. She asked for Mira's address. Sarah gave it with black misgivings in her heart. She could have shaken Bubbele.

"How comes it your relatives permitted you to be evicted?"

The investigator laid a rude hand upon a bruised heart.

Sarah's lips quivered, her eyes reddened and smarted. What explanation could she make? How, indeed, was it that the relatives had permitted the calamity? She could not say.

The investigator shrewdly decided that here was a matter requiring a detective's skill and she would have to exercise her ingenuity to ferret out what was at the bottom of Sarah's silence on this point.

"I think," she said finishing her writing, "you had better come with me now, and we will find rooms."

Sarah gave Mrs. Block a look which said: "We hunted, did we not? My side hurts." Mrs. Block's look in return said: "It is lunch time ; we ought to have a little to eat." But neither demurred.

Sarah rose, put on her shawl and stood ready to go. Ida and Bubbele followed her to the door. She pushed them aside impatiently.

They found two rooms on the fifth floor of a Rutgers Street tenement, at seven dollars a month. The investigator, eager to be on her way, handed Sarah five dollars in the presence of the janitress, saying:

"I will pay the janitress ; this is for moving and food. To-morrow morning at nine o'clock you must come to the Charities."

Exactly what Sarah had dreaded—that the Lady would disgrace her before the janitress. Her heart

pounded at her ribs, her knees threatened to give way. As she made her way back to Mrs. Block's home, little children looked at her timidly, as if she were crazy, and shied away from this woman with the queer staring eyes who muttered to herself: "Such a life——! Such dark fortune——! Better to be dead—to be dead!"

XXXI

Sarah and her fatherless progeny went down on the records of the Peoples Charities as Case No. 31100. The last two paragraphs of the filing card read:

"Visited relatives of applicant. Found said relatives not in want. Said they had helped applicant immediately after death of husband, but applicant got to expect help and would not help herself. Asked how it was they let applicant be evicted. Said they did not know of eviction.

"Would recommend, as applicant seems well and strong, that she be given work in the work-room to prevent pauperization."

Miss Kranz, the investigator, laid this report on the desk of the Head of the Department at closing hour. The next morning the Head of the Department, who, out of devotion to her work, always arrived at the office half an hour in advance of the other employees, read it and returned it with an O. K. as to the recommendation and with the notation: "How about asylum for two younger children?" The case thus lay on Miss Kranz's desk pending the arrival of the case in the flesh.

While Sarah was receiving this absent treatment, she

was hurrying and scurrying in her new household. She was so nervous that things dropped from her hands and her voice rang shrilly as she told the older children leaving for school that she was going to the Charities and would not be at home lunch time. Her fingers trembled as she handed Jacob twenty-five cents for the usual investment in newspapers.

Holding Ida and Bubbele, whose hands were as clean as could be, Sarah wearily plodded her way to the Charities. As she approached the place, she was conscious of a peculiar, horrifying sensation—a sensation she vaguely felt she had experienced on another occasion. What was it? She paused in an effort to recall. Elias? What had Elias to do with it? In an instant her memory became vividly alive. “I felt when I left there as if I had been spilt with *pamoonitza*. And that is for work. How must it be when one comes for money!” So she had said to Elias after her first visit to the Charities. She shivered convulsively. How *was* it going to be——! She was coming for money!

“With a real mother’s heart——” rang in her mind—— Grasping the children’s hands more firmly she hastened up the steps.

A boy ushered her into a large square room in which were rows of wooden benches where there already sat others in her same plight. She slunk to a rear bench and sat down, the children clinging to her skirts. It was early and employees straggled in one by one. A formidable quiet held the place, broken by an occasional cough, the creaking of a bench, a whisper. Sarah’s nightmare sense was even more intensified. “God mine am I really I?” she asked herself.

The arrival of Miss Kranz dashed the reality of it all

in her face. Her heart pounded, she perspired, her breath came faster, her thoughts more clearly. "I have come here for my children's sake. I will take alms for my children's sake. I will sacrifice my decency for my children's sake—I will ask them to give me scrubbing and washing by ladies. A little I can earn that way——"

Meanwhile Miss Kranz was running her fingers deftly along the edges of a stack of cards to find case No. 31100. Glancing at the notation on it she beckoned to the case in the flesh.

"Will you let us," she said when she had Sarah seated facing her, "put these two younger children in the orphan asylum?"

Orphan asylum meant nothing to Sarah, who had never heard the expression before; yet her heart leapt to the fear of separation from her children. She wiped her sweaty face with a trembling hand and asked timidly: "What is it, an orphan asylum?" She was told. It was like being convinced of the reality of a ghost. This that she was listening to could not be—it could not be.

"You may have a few days to think it over," sounded Miss Kranz's voice as from another world. "And now about you," the voice went on in a tone of admonition, "you will have to do some work—here in the work-room."

"Yes?"

Miss Kranz scented surprise in Sarah's tone.

"Yes!" she replied with peppery sharpness and a survey of Sarah's body that gauged her working powers. "You are certainly well enough to work. A healthy woman can't sit back and fold her hands."

Here Miss Kranz was interrupted by another investigator to have a laugh with her over an applicant who

insisted that the United States owed him a living—the United States was rich enough—— With a lingering smile Miss Kranz turned again to Case No. 31100.

“Well, make up your mind about the children first, and when I come to see you the day after to-morrow, be ready to give me your decision. I would advise you to let them go.” (Those were not the days when to keep the family together was considered “scientific” charity.) She paused as if to let her advice sink in. “Then I will see about getting work for you here in the work-room. Can you sew?”

Sarah abominated sewing. She said meekly: “I never sewed much.”

Miss Kranz rose hastily. Sarah out of timidity instantly did the same. Miss Kranz said with impatience.

“That’s all right, that’s all right. You can learn to sew. You have to do *some* work.”

Sarah longed to say that she preferred day’s work, but the words would not frame themselves. She led the children out, her heart crying: “Woe—woe is me!” The children talked to her. She hushed them up. Little Bubbele could not keep pace with her mother’s hurried steps and tugged on Sarah’s skirt. Sarah paid no attention until the child threw herself down on the pavement and kicked and screamed.

“My darling!” Sarah raised her from the ground and kissed her passionately. “No, no, darling mine, mama will walk slower. Woe—woe is me!”

At home the janitress informed Sarah that a woman had called. “A *woman*,” she emphasized—“not a lady,” to distinguish the caller from the Charities investigator. Sarah dropped her eyes and hurried the children up the

stairs. "Who could it have been!" she pondered. In the house Sarah threw herself on the lounge while the two children made straight for chairs, all of them panting from the steep climb. Sarah lay gazing at the blank wall, her mind a dizzy jumble of disconnected thoughts of the Charities, orphan asylum, the woman caller—who she could have been; and she agitated herself over the potential gossiping propensities of the new janitress. "Woe is me, all the tenants will know we live on charity if she is a gossip——"

The children were so still that Sarah looked up. She encountered a pair of troubled little faces with eyes regarding her fixedly. Ida tearfully crying "Ma!" jumped up and ran to her mother; Bubbele followed and threw her baby body over Sarah's chest, and wailed, moved by a child's intuition that all was not well with her mama.

"Don't cry, darling. Mama is not crying. Did you think mama was crying? No, no, darling." And as if to prove that she was as cheerful as she sounded, Sarah rose and went about her home duties. "Do you want apple and bread for lunch, darling?" she asked Bubbele.

"Yah!" the child piped as babylike as baby can be. Sarah smiled, and Ida implanted a kiss on Bubbele's mouth.

Sarah looked into the bread box. There was bread enough—but there were no apples in the house! Sighing, she resigned herself to the arduous climb again. She brought bread as well as apples, for her thoughts had been: "Scraps are not enough for growing children like Minnie and Jacob. When I was a growing girl my mother used to make me eat quantities of sour cream and cheese and sweet butter and black bread. My children are to be pitied—my four fatherless babies!"

Jacob and Minnie bouncing in from school were delighted to find the family at home, and doubly so when they discovered the feast of bread and apples. While her little family were munching and chatting, Sarah thought:

"They are children after all, even Minnie and Jacob. How they talk and laugh already! As if everything is as before—as if their father were not dead—as if they had not been on the street two days ago!" She sighed and shrugged her shoulders in uncomprehending tolerance of the ways of the young.

Minnie and Jacob were soon off to school again. Bubbele and Ida lay down to sleep off the effects of the morning's expedition. Sarah sat by the window and thought: "To send the children to an orphan asylum must mean to give them away and sign a paper——" (Signing a paper to our tenement friends is to commit one's self beyond recall.) "It is like handing them over as a gift—— My children I should give away to strangers!" A sense of outrage flamed up in her soul. "I will not give them away and sign a paper if they will throw us *ten* times out of rooms and I will sooner work my fingers to the bone——" She debated with herself as if she were her own opponent. . . . Then her thoughts drifted to the other aspect of the situation. "But if the children will get enough to eat there! It will be better for them—they are children and will soon get used to being without me. That *I* will long for them should not matter——"

A light tap on the door roused her.

Never in her life was Sarah so glad to see anyone as she was now to see her friend and enemy, Mira Cohen.

* * * * *

In her tour of investigation of the Mendel Case, Miss

Kranz had included Mira Cohen, who, unaware of the eviction, had given information based on the old status of Sarah's offensiveness and ingratitude. When she learned of the eviction, however, she could, as she told her husband in the evening, have bitten her tongue off, so provoked was she with herself for having diminished Sarah's chances of obtaining assistance.

"How should I have known?" she argued to appease her conscience as she tossed on her bed in the small hours of the night. "She insulted me only because she was so desperate. I ought to go to see her. Bygones ought to be bygones. They were thrown out on the *street*! And it was even a rainy day. My God in heaven! I will go to see her the first thing in the morning."

However, the dawn found Mira's conscience less alert, and it was not until ten o'clock that her resolution to visit Sarah and let bygones be bygones took the form of action. Not finding Sarah in, she had applied to the janitress to make sure the Charities investigator had given her the right address and returned home resolved to call again in the afternoon.

In the melancholy twilight of the room, Mira listened in true sympathy as Sarah laid bare her bitter heart.

* * * * *

"Minnie, go down and buy a postal card and write on it what I tell you," said Sarah in the evening.

Though tired from a long day of school and nursework, Minnie made the wearisome journey.

"What sh'll I say, ma?" she asked as, breathless, she sat down to write.

Sarah laid a card before the child. "Copy the address from here," she said.

Minnie, copying, wrote:

"Peoples Charities, Mustend Street, Case No. 31100, Sarah Mendel."

"What sh'll I tell her?"

"Tell her," said Sarah, looking away nervously, "that she should please excuse me from signing a paper for my fatherless children to give them to the Gerry Society."

Sarah spoke in Yiddish; by labored effort Minnie produced a faithful translation in English. But what a struggle when she came to "Gerry!" It must be a mistake. She had not been taught the word at school. She could not believe the English language guilty of including such a meaningless term. Finally she wrote "Gehrer." That done, she looked up at her mother and asked:

"Ma, who do they wanna take away—them?" she pointed to Bubbele and Ida.

"Yah, ma, usn?" Bubbele asked.

"No, darling," said Sarah, gathering the baby in her arms, "it is just for fun."

The children were satisfied.

"What's the Gehrer Society?" asked Minnie.

Sarah looked quickly away. Her manner grew forbidding.

What was a Gehrer Society, indeed? A place where Jewish orphans were converted to Christianity, where a cross was branded on the child's chest, arm, or back; where a child was whipped mercilessly on the slightest provocation, especially the Jewish child. A place that did not relinquish the child, once the paper was signed, before it attained maturity, if ever the child did attain maturity. What! Send her Ida and Bubbele to such a place! Visions of the "country" came to Sarah, of Mira's wisdom in identifying it with a slaughterhouse. She shuddered. "Not, if to keep them, I must work my

fingers to the bone." Besides, Mira had promised (with the simple primitive virtue of her class, *real* self-sacrifice) that were Sarah to get work for every day, she would, and gladly, clean Sarah's home daily, cook, take care of the children—and, in short, do for Sarah as she would be done by.

XXXII

The morning on which Sarah expected Miss Kranz she went about her work in a flutter of nervous expectation. The morning passed, the lunch hour passed, but no investigator appeared. Late in the afternoon, when Sarah had decided that Miss Kranz was not coming and had donned her working apron intending to polish the stove, a rap sounded on the door, followed by Miss Kranz's entrance. Sarah hastily spread both her hands flat over her stomach where the apron was most soiled. Miss Kranz's sharp eyes traveled swiftly over her person.

"How are you, Mrs. Mendel?"

Sarah, making no reply, dropped her eyes and flushed.

"Nice rooms," remarked Miss Kranz, with a hasty survey of the premises. Observing a pot on the stove she approached it in a casual manner. Sarah's hands were clammy. She lifted a corner of her apron, partly to wipe them and partly to gain time to control the horrid beating of her heart. The investigator threw a hasty glance into the pot; its melancholy emptiness proclaimed Sarah Not Guilty!

"Well, how are you?" Miss Kranz repeated, and seated herself.

Sarah also seated herself, so conscious of her soiled apron that she could not think clearly of anything else.

"Thanks," she said.

It being the privilege of a Charities investigator to instruct the lowly in the ways of proper living, the lady remarked, though quite gently:

"Now, Mrs. Mendel, look at your apron. It is very dirty. There is no need for that. Water does not cost any money." She rose, walked over to the sink, and turned on the faucet to demonstrate how freely the water flowed.

Sarah, her color mounting rapidly, again placed her palms flat over her stomach, and smiled inanely in apology.

"Nobody can be healthy who is not clean," continued Miss Kranz to enlighten the ignorant object of charity. Sarah's left shoulder jerked nervously backward and forward; she sighed a sigh chopped in two as it left her breast. Miss Kranz reseated herself. "Well, have you decided about the children?"

Sarah's breath came short; her heart-beats seemed to thunder in her ears. In fear and trepidation she replied:

"I want to keep my children. I do not want to send them to a Gerry Society."

"Gerry Society? Who thinks of sending them to the Gerry Society? We want to place them in an *orphan asylum* where there are none but Jewish children. They will be better off there than *here*." Miss Kranz threw a circular, semi-disdainful glance around the room.

Sarah became panic-stricken. Not a Gerry Society? The firm ground of her objection rocked beneath her feet. Yet were it ever so much an orphan asylum and ever so little a Gerry Society, she did not want to part from her children. She bent forward and spoke with restrained excitement.

"But I am used to having them at home. I want them."

"Now, Mrs. Mendel, if you wish our help, you must be satisfied to do as we say. We want to do the best for you."

Sarah twisted her fingers under her apron.

"I know. But it is very bitter." Tears came to her eyes.

"Well, think it over a little longer, and I will report what you said to-day," concluded Miss Kranz, rising.

"I want to work," Sarah said, also rising.

Miss Kranz gave her a quick, interested glance. "Well, well, coming round," she thought. In a tone of especial kindness she told Sarah to come to the office the following morning, and advised her in the meantime to consider carefully the matter of the children's future. Sarah followed her to the door burning to retort that she *had* already considered it carefully, but Miss Kranz turned to face her and she dropped her eyes, and hastily promised obedience.

"Have you much left of the money I gave you?"

Sarah blinked. "I have enough." Miss Kranz did not require assurance of the truth of the statement.

When the door closed, Sarah stood dazed; then in a few moments she walked automatically into the bedroom and looked at her two sleeping babies. "*Mein Gott!*" she moaned, and wrung her hands. Bubbele stirred; Sarah tiptoed out. In an effort at self-control she set to polishing the stove, but soon dropped the brush and went to the window. One vacant stare out of the window, and she stepped over to the sink, removed her apron, and put it under the running water. The water seeping through the apron came out darkly discolored.

"It is very dirty," she thought, flushing scarlet. She rubbed soap on, but too nervous to stay at the task threw down the soap and went back to the window.

"God! they will take the children away. They will take them away!" She wrung her hands despairingly. She wanted to scream, to dash her head through the windowpane. She pressed her hand against her scalp which was raw and painful; she was feverishly hot. A terrible vague fear shot through her. In her terror she threw open the window. "God, my God! I am going crazy!" she cried, pressing her palms to her temples.

Bubbele cried out. The child dreamed that her mother spilled a pitcher of cold water over her. Sarah, startled, slammed the window shut and rushed to her baby, who wailed and clung to her.

"Yes, my dollele, yes," Sarah soothed her, stroking her warm forehead with her dank hand. Ida, too, awakened, and the three moved into the room-of-all-affairs.

All night Sarah tossed restlessly on her bed, rehearsing how she would refuse to send her children to the Orphan Asylum or Gehrer Society or whatever it was.

The morning found her ill and unable to go to the Charities. In the afternoon she sent Minnie to summon the ever-responsive Mira. And Mira, on leaving Sarah, deposited a dollar bill (Sarah's cash *had* run low) under a broken plate on the table and consoled her:

"But if you were sick!"

XXXIII

It was two days before Sarah was well enough to go to the Charities. Anxious to forestall criticism, she

washed and pressed the children's dresses, and scrubbed and scoured their little bodies; as a result of which she arrived late, and went down in Miss Kranz's opinion as one of the habitually dependent, such as the relatives had made her out to be. Miss Kranz's cold reception of her only aggravated Sarah's timidity. With heart pounding and breath labored, she seated herself, drawing the two children close, and with trembling fingers smoothed out a wrinkle from her apron.

"You must let your husband go to the hospital," Miss Kranz's voice reached her. "We can do nothing for you until you do as we say." Miss Kranz ushered out an applicant who stood with fingers clasped in mute appeal. Sarah felt as if she must die if Miss Kranz proved as relentless about the children and the Gerry Society. But, whatever the obstacles, she braced herself to carry out her resolution.

"Well, Mrs. Mendel, so you have come?" Before Sarah could grasp the insinuation in the words and offer an explanation, Miss Kranz added: "Come upstairs with me."

Sarah rose quickly grasping a child with each hand.

"No, leave the children down here."

Sarah cast a hasty suspicious glance round the room. The subtle agony in it was lost on Miss Kranz.

"Will they not be in the way?"

"No. They may sit on your chair."

Seating Bubbele, Sarah stood Ida next to her and whispered: "Under no circumstances leave her; and don't let anyone bribe you away from the spot." If Sarah's wish had taken flight to heaven, all orphan asylums and Gerry Societies would have crumbled to dust at that moment.

She followed Miss Kranz through a wide corridor, up a spacious stairway, to a door marked "606—Work-room." It was a long, rather narrow room, in which great stacks of clothes piled up around the windows kept out the daylight. Miss Kranz's whistle brought a response in a refined woman's voice.

"All right, Miss Kranz, I'm coming."

From behind a partition emerged a middle-aged lady, whose personality suggested a closed chapter of affluence and culture. She came slowly forward and smiled in expectancy of an introduction.

"Mrs. Mendel—Mrs. Newman."

Mrs. Newman again smiled her well-bred smile. Miss Kranz drawing her aside gave her the details of the new case. Mrs. Newman listened, while casting side glances at Sarah, who stood fumbling with her apron. The interview ended with Miss Kranz familiarly tapping Mrs. Newman's chin and flippantly asking: "*Verstehen Sie?*"

"All right, my dear," said Mrs. Newman with motherly sweetness, and turned in a businesslike manner to Sarah, who timidly drew a step nearer, though she kept her eyes fastened on Miss Kranz as she moved to the door. She was about to take the risk of asking whether the children were quite safe downstairs, when Miss Kranz sang out: "Oh, Mrs. Newman, send Mrs. Mendel down to me again when you are through with her; her children are downstairs." Sarah's anguish subsided.

"Sit down, my good woman," said Mrs. Newman, pointing out a chair. Sarah falteringly seated herself. Mrs. Newman scanned the premises, then walked leisurely to the front of the room and as leisurely returned with a chair. Seating herself she released a gold chain

from a tiny reel which lay embedded in her ample bosom and placed the attached glasses on her nose.

"*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*" she asked leaning forward and compressing her lips.

Sarah giving her an eager glance said: "Ya," with a touch of pride.

"Oh," Mrs. Newman ejaculated, "where do you come from?"

"Memel."

"Well, you are quite German," Mrs. Newman's comment was accompanied by an obviously complimentary look. Sarah dropped her eyes and sighed the sigh of one who has lost an inheritance.

"Have you been a widow long?"

"No."

"Was your husband German also?"

"No, he was from the Baltic provinces."

Mrs. Newman concluding she had done enough to put the applicant at ease, straightened up for business. Sarah perceiving that Mrs. Newman meant to change the subject, reflected that her husband's Russianism had detracted from the glory of her Germanism. A pained expression came into her eyes, and she sighed lightly.

"You see," Mrs. Newman began, pointing at the stacks of old clothes, "these things are sent here by good people for poor people like you and your children. The things are often torn and require mending. That is the work you will have to do here. You'll start at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. That will give you time to send the children off to school." Mrs. Newman smiled kindly again. "The women are all very nice here. You will soon make friends. The work is easy, plain sewing,

you know." She rose; Sarah followed suit. "Come tomorrow at ten," Mrs. Newman glanced toward the door to indicate that Sarah was dismissed.

Poor Sarah longed to tell her that she was not an adept seamstress and vastly preferred work "by ladies." But Mrs. Newman, whose day was too full to allow her much time for a single applicant, divining that Sarah had things to say (they *all* had if one gave oneself *up* to them) assumed the forbidding air of the superior, which quashed Sarah's courage.

"You go down the hall and down the stairs. Miss Kranz's room is on the first floor. Good-by." The directions were given with flawless courtesy. But Mrs. Newman turned her back.

It was many years since Sarah had experienced a moment of self-respect and social equality; and the rapid termination of the luxury left her miserable. In a daze she turned to the door and left hurriedly.

"Sit down, mama," Ida whispered when Sarah appeared in Miss Kranz's room. Sarah remained standing, however, for Miss Kranz, busy writing, gave no indication of what was expected of her. Sarah wiped her sweaty face with her hands and her sweaty hands on the corner of her apron.

When Miss Kranz finally wheeled round in her chair and shot the question, "Well, how about the children?" Sarah grew so dizzy that she almost reeled. With the irresponsibility of excessive nervousness, she cried:

"I will not give them away. I suffered the torture of bringing my children into the world, I will keep them." A flame of self-assertion burned in her eyes and a dare-devil spirit supplanted her timidity.

The refined Miss Kranz, taken aback, made no reply.

At the close of the day her notation on the report-card of Case No. 31100 read: "Applicant offensively refused to commit children."

XXXIV

Shortly before ten o'clock the following morning, Sarah, successfully evading an encounter with Miss Kranz, stealthily made her way through the spacious hall to the work-room. As she paused hesitatingly on the threshold, Mrs. Newman looked up, greeted her with the cordiality of one meeting another on the same level and invited her in. "Take off your shawl," she said as she called: "Miss Greenberg, oh, Miss Greenberg!"

From behind a table piled high with old clothing came a little middle-aged woman, whose face betrayed one long, bitter struggle with Fate, in which Fate had won.

"Miss Greenberg, this is Mrs. Mendel."

Miss Greenberg in no way indicated that she was affected by the introduction. Some whispered instruction, then Miss Greenberg called in a dry voice: "Come missus!" and turned sharply. Mrs. Newman motioned Sarah to follow. Sarah did so with bowed head. Miss Greenberg stopping at the center of a long, narrow table, drew out a vacant chair.

"Sit down here," she said to Sarah and walked away.

Other women seated at the table gave the new woman a hasty glance of inspection and bent again over their work. Sarah's senses were numb. At Miss Greenberg's reappearance she grew a bit panicky, and received the needle, thread, thimble and pair of scissors with unsteady hands. "Try on the thimble," said Miss Green-

berg in the same dry, lifeless voice, and again left abruptly.

The thimble leapt out of Sarah's fingers to the floor and rolled into an obscure corner of the room. Terror struck her heart. She bent here and there in search of it, conscious of ten Miss Greenbergs and a dozen Mrs. Newmans and a whole roomful of persecuting women. She grew hot and sweaty and enraged with her lucklessness. Just as she located the thimble Miss Greenberg re-appeared. Sarah was seated.

"Fix this with backhand stitches," said Miss Greenberg, holding up a heavy brown coat in which was a rent. Laying the coat on Sarah's lap Miss Greenberg was off again.

Now nature in her wisdom or folly had omitted from Sarah's composition any aptitude for needlework. She had never sewed, had never learned how to sew, and had never wanted to learn how to sew. This suddenly imposed task was a cruelty. But who saw it as such? Who sees it as such to-day? Poverty is an attribute which subjects all who possess it to a Procrustean law.

Sarah tried to comprehend the meaningless words, "backhand stitches" and excitedly fumbled with the needle and the thread to effect their necessary alliance. At last she succeeded in inserting the thread. Her relief was only momentary, for she drew the thread the wrong way and pulled it out again. Flushing scarlet she more nervously attempted the threading a second time. Concluding the operation, she adjusted the heavy coat to her lap. "Backhand stitches!" rang in her ears. What were they? She leaned a little toward the neighbor on her right to glimpse, if possible, how she did it. The woman lifted a face so desiccated and unfriendly that Sarah

hastily turned the other way. There she encountered a placid countenance, as vacant as a cow's and a broad grin that kept the mouth wide open and displayed large, white regular teeth.

"What is the matter, missus?"

Sarah, fearful of provoking displeasure, looked about timorously to see whether Mrs. Newman or Miss Greenberg were observing her. She knew instinctively that Miss Greenberg was easily moved to anger.

"You needn't be afraid; I am allowed to help you." The woman waved her hand as an accompaniment to the boast. "I am already an old customer. They all ask me when they first come." Her grin ended in a dull giggle. Sarah gave a hurried nervous glance round.

"What's backhand stitches?" she whispered, a timid smile on her flushed face.

"Oh, like that——" the woman said, taking Sarah's coat and needle.

As Sarah looked on in strained attention, the other's fingers flew deftly and evenly over the rent. But when Sarah attempted to imitate, her needle snapped at the third stitch. Such agony was expressed in Sarah's eyes that the phlegmatic woman was moved.

"Wait a minute," she whispered. "I will get you another needle." She turned to her neighbor; the neighbor had no needle to spare. She was about to rise and appropriate one from the drawer in which the needles were kept when Miss Greenberg appeared to investigate the new woman's progress. Had it not been for Sarah's obvious nervousness and distress Miss Greenberg would have given the deserved reprimand. As it was she went off without comment for another needle.

"As long as she did not holler, don't care," the left-hand neighbor encouraged Sarah.

Miss Greenberg stood over Sarah as she tried once more to thread the needle. So the task became utterly impossible and though Miss Greenberg had seen trembling hands before, she was moved to thread the needle herself. Abstractedly she lingered beside Sarah, resting one hand against the table. Sarah's instructor bent stealthily over the hand, kissed it, and flung up her face beaming with a phlegmatic, ingratiating smile. Miss Greenberg good-naturedly tapped her on the head. One or two women laughed. The woman at Sarah's right scowled and muttered: "Sucker!" Sarah experienced a curious sensation of uncleanness and strangeness to herself. She threw a swift glance at the women—the room—and struggled to realize her own presence there—her relationship to it all. With a sigh she lowered her eyes. She sent her needle too deep into the heavy material and it snapped again.

The repeated offense roused Miss Greenberg to a sense of her supervisory capacity. She snatched the broken needle, went quickly for another and told Sarah that there would not be a third.

Sarah labored over the rent all morning and was exhausted.

Her left-hand neighbor initiated her into the way of closing shop; she was to stow her needle here, her thimble there, *et cetera*. As the women departed they sang out cordial good-by's to their supervisors and to their partners in poverty. The room was finally deserted. Sarah timidly lingered, awaiting Mrs. Newman's instructions. The worthy lady at last appeared, asked her why she hadn't left, and told her to be on time in the

morning. "Wasn't it nice and pleasant?" she asked and, waiting for no reply, added: "It's nice and pleasant," and turned away.

On the stairs Sarah found the phlegmatic neighbor waiting for her, evidently eager to learn Sarah's pedigree. Sarah in her misery turned abruptly, as though from a bad stench, and left the woman muttering: "Ungrateful! Crank!"

Miss Greenberg reported to Mrs. Newman that the "new case" was "very slow and inefficient." Mrs. Newman, with a wise air, replied Sarah was "that sort, you know."

Minnie and Jacob were leaving for the afternoon session when Sarah returned, feeling as if she had been gone from her children an eternity. Passionately she hugged and kissed Bubbele as her heart cried: "Elias! oh, Elias!" And she sank down on the lounge and shook with sobs as deep as the misery of her life. Ida and Bubbele, frightened and pale, tugged at her skirt and tried to tear her hands away from her face. Failing, they, too, burst into sobs. But Sarah could not control herself—not even for their sake.

In the evening Mira came again, to Sarah's immense solace.

XXXV

From Mira's manner, as she entered the room, Sarah discerned at once that she had a confidence to impart, and, therefore, checked her impulse to pour out the tale of her tribulations. Mira, however, no less quick to discern, cried commiseratingly:

"Nu, what is it, God mine? You look yellow in the

face, and your forehead is as furrowed as if the world were weighing on your head."

Sarah's lips quivered; she dropped her eyes. Tears came in spite of her attempt at self-control.

"Nu, speak out your heart; it will relieve you," Mira urged.

"For me there is no relief," Sarah replied.

But Mira insisted, and with the telling of her experiences a faint relief came to Sarah's soul. At least there was one person in the world who understood the smart, the sting, the humiliation, the agony of what she was going through.

And it was not Mira's sympathy alone that consoled; Mira seemed also to have a definite remedy of some sort up her sleeve. Every little while, during Sarah's recital, she threw a sidelong glance from her sharp, blue eyes and thrust her chin forward as much as to say: "Wait till you hear what *I* have to tell!" And when Sarah concluded her tale, she sat up straighter and darted intenser glances.

"What is *your* news?" asked Sarah.

"What are you talking about?" Mira burst out, as if Sarah had been contradicting her. "I am a *business* lady."

She answered Sarah's look of astonishment and interrogation by opening a package and displaying pieces of black buckram edged with wire.

"They, my relatives, sent me this from Boston. They call it bends (Mira's pronunciation of "bands"), and they told me that I should try to get orders for the bends in the millinery stores here in New York. If I succeed, they will send me a lot of the buckram and wire, and I can make them up myself and sell them at a profit, which

will go to me. I went around from store to store and I have got orders galore." She smacked her thin lips, settled back in her chair, and looked up as if challenging Sarah to mention another person as smart as herself, while her knob of red hair nodded back: "I should say there *isn't* anyone as smart as I am." As an afterthought she added: "It is really very nice of my relatives;" but since it was not in her nature to give the devil a bit more than his due, she quickly hooked on: "But they are in Boston. They could not sell in New York anyway. So what does it hurt them?" Another thought popped into her head. "Nu, who knows? Mira Cohen can yet become a regular business lady." Her eyes moistened. Mira was one of those people who are *not* so sure that the sun shines behind the clouds. She, too, was having a hard struggle, with a "useless" husband, an unruly daughter, and a stuttering son.

For a time both women gazed into space, as though trying to fathom the deeps of life. Sarah was the first to break the silence by sighing. Then Mira said the thing for which Sarah's curiosity had been palpitating.

"Who knows—if I get enough orders you can maybe help me with the sewing, and we can do the business together. If there will be for you a little and for me a little it will be enough——" She gave a shrug of her shoulders. "Who expects to become a *millionaire*?" she added deprecatingly, as if to propitiate fate.

Again they gazed into space. Before Sarah's vision passed scenes of the Charities work-room. How she loathed it! Would Mira's "bends" hold a way out? She dared not hope so far. Time and again, bending over her sewing, which required daily a veritable revolutionizing of her nature, she felt it would be more decent to squat

on the curb on Grand Street grinding an organ for pennies. How she loathed it!

Mira, to cheer her, told a story of a poor man who had a dog, who was driven by hunger to commit a theft and took the dog along. It was in the dead of night. The dog, hearing a strange sound, barked. The man tried to quiet the animal. "S-sh, dog," he said, "if I make a successful robbery, you, too, shall have a bone to suck."

XXXVI

Sarah always slunk past Miss Kranz's office in terror. If only she could evade being called upon to give a decision regarding the children, she thought, until Mira took her into partnership, "the world would be mine." Once in the work-room she would breathe easily again and lose herself in dreams of a brighter future, in which her two rooms on Rutgers Street were filled with buckram, coils of wire, thimbles, needles, thread. Around the table sat she, Minnie, Ida, and even Jacob, manufacturing bands. In this glory, the work-room faded into non-existence.

One day Miss Kranz opened the door upon a most vivid dream. Crash went Sarah's castle in the air! "Woe is me, if only she has not come to tell me I must give the children away!" The whole miserable reality overwhelmed her.

"Well, Mrs. Mendel," Miss Kranz called, as Sarah's soul made its descent from the air-castle to hell.

"Well, dear!" came from Mrs. Newman. Miss Kranz turned from Sarah, greeted the supervisor, and the two walked away together.

Had Sarah only known that she need have no fear! Those whose province it was to mould the destinies of

the worthy poor had decided that it would be better to wait until Sarah herself begged for shelter for her children. They proceeded on the theory that if a man wished to affect small feet he should be given small shoes and allowed to feel the pinch of them until he himself cried out. But the Charities did not know all the facts. How could they know the facts when Sarah had not told them? What reason had they to suspect that a source of income rising to seventy-five cents and even a dollar a week flowed from Jacob; that Minnie's mothering of the butcher's twins yielded another munificent sum; that there existed a sympathetic relative who, according to his wife's version, was cursed with a good nature that blessed the Mendels with an occasional gift of money, and that there was a conscience-stricken compatriot, Mira?

For some time after her last call, Mira did not come again. Twice she had sent a dollar bill by the sympathetic relative and a message that she would visit Sarah soon. But ten full weeks passed without her putting in appearance and Sarah decided that if the mountain did not come to her, she would go to the mountain.

Her dream of piles of buckram, endless coils of wire, and quantities of needles, thimbles, and thread, with children helping, had become a fact at Mira's home. When she entered, she found Mira heated, with black streaks discolored her face, bent busily over her work.

Mira flushed self-consciously. She had received many orders for the bands, enough, in fact, to keep someone else beside herself and children busy. Yet who can blame Mira? He who has just saved himself from drowning is not eager to go back into the deep water to rescue another. For the first time since she had come to America, Mira enjoyed the comfort of knowing that twenty-

five dollars rested in the bank for her. How could she be expected to share the intoxication with a mere compatriot? Besides, when she had told Sarah her news and had suggested partnership, she had done so unpremeditatedly, under the swift impulse of pity for her unhappy friend.

The evening passed in conversation on the various phases of their respective lots in life, while in the back of each of their minds danced the promised partnership. Mira, however, said not a word on the subject. Indeed, a few minutes after Sarah's arrival, she and her children cleared away all traces of the new industry.

Sarah walked home with an intensity of bitterness raging in her heart such as even she had never experienced. In the days that followed Elias's death, she had been dazed. Now she was as painfully sensitive as an open wound. She saw in all its clearness what lay ahead for her and her children. They were doomed forever to poverty, to sordidness, the lowest dregs of humiliation. The cup of hope had been held to her lips only to be dashed to the ground.

All night, wide-eyed and sleepless, she lay staring despairingly into the darkness. Jumbled thoughts, yet none the less vivid, tossed in her brain. Her fate was to be innumerable years of serfdom in the Charities work-room, with the cow-like creature always at her right and the yellow, shrivelled half-corpse at her left. And worse yet, no other fate seemed likely, even for her children. She pictured them branded with crosses on the chests, domineered over by rough Gerry Society officials; in maturity cast out into the heartless world like herself—— And by then she would be dead! . . . She lay in frozen rigidity. A wave of misery seemed to surge over her

head, so that she gasped for breath. . . . She shook herself. Suddenly she was gripped by the fear that in such deep despair lay destruction. Her soul struggled as out of a quicksand toward hopefulness. *Why* this despair? Was she not able-bodied? Was all the world but the Charities closed to her? Could *she* not do something, *too*—do something—— She sat bolt upright, spurred by a new impetus. . . . If success were possible for the homely, unrefined, red-headed Mira, why was not success possible for her, too? If Mira's children, one "meshuga," another a "mecka," could be of help to her in a business, why could not *her* children be of much greater help? Why could *she* not be a business lady, too?

XXXVII

"Minnie," Sarah said the next evening (her daughter had just returned from a club meeting at the Queen's Daughters, Jacob was out selling his papers, and the younger children were on the street), "I want you to go over to Mira. Say you passed and just stepped in. When she is not looking, take a piece of black buckram with wire sewed on the edge. You will see pieces like that lying around there. Hide it under your dress and bring it home."

Minnie knew all about Mira's "bends" business, having heard her mother tell of it to the Sympathetic Relative.

Sarah held her head high as she spoke and put a touch of defiance into her manner, in anticipation of opposition from her young daughter.

Minnie looked at her mother at first uncomprehend-

ingly, then in astonishment. Though her intuition warned her that she would rouse her mother's displeasure, she answered in a fretful, self-defensive tone:

"I don' wanna, mama."

Sarah was well aware that her request was no credit to her motherhood, but it was not the province of a child of hers to tell her so. She grew angry. Her upper lip twitched, her lids fluttered, her body stiffened. She advanced upon Minnie, ready to shake the child, who withdrew into a corner of the room.

"You do not *want* to?" she shouted. The two glared at each other, Minnie, her thumb in her mouth, her head bent and eyes raised.

"Didn' you yourself send me back wid the nickel that time to the grocery store when I brang it too much for you? By Mira to go and take is stealing! I don' wanna steal."

A slap in the face would have been easier to bear. Sarah took a hasty step forward, raised her fist and slowly, taking a breath after each word, shouted at the cowering child:

"All black years on your head, you ungrateful worm, you! I slave for you to keep you home. To the *Gerry Society* I ought to send you, *all* of you, where others send their children. *All* of you I ought to send there. Instead I slave for you and fight with everybody to keep you together, and now you stand before me, small as you are, and call me a *thief*!" The passionate outburst was so out of keeping with what the child's diffident refusal merited that even Sarah realized it as soon as the words were out of her mouth. True to human nature, she had sought self-defense in the exaggeration of the offense.

Minnie, petrified but not crushed, sobbed as she cried: "Why don' you send Jacob, or Ida 'stead a me?"

Here Ida entered. She stood at the door a moment rubbing her nose with the cuff of her dress; her face was blue and pinched with the cold.

"Wots a madder, ma?" she asked.

"Go away!" Sarah shouted. The child staggered back.

Sarah flung out of the room into the bedroom and threw herself upon the bed. But her pounding heart made a recumbent position impossible. She jumped up again and returned to the room-of-all-affairs, where Minnie, crouching in a corner, was silently weeping. Ida, seated on the lounge, sprang to her feet at sight of her angry mother.

"Your sister," Sarah cried to Ida, "is a whole honest lady. Maybe, my younger daughter, you are such a lady, too?" Her tone carried bitter sarcasm. Taking a deep breath and coming close to Ida, she began emphatically: "Now, Ida——" And she repeated her demand.

For the very life of her Ida could not understand why such a fuss had been made over such a little thing.

"Sure I'll go. Sh'll I go now? I'll take Bubbele along, hah?"

"All right," said Sarah, with averted eyes. Sarah never forgot that scene with Minnie.

Ida left and in half an hour returned, bringing the Mendels' future in her little hand.

XXXVIII

For three days Sarah and Minnie were not on speaking terms. The evening of the third day they happened to be left alone together in the home. Minnie was busily

engaged in her studies; Sarah was struggling to edge pieces of black buckram with black wire. Suddenly her needle snapped, and the broken point pierced under her fingernail. She shrieked with the pain. Minnie, terrified, jumped up and rushed to her. "Mama!" she cried, "oh, mama, mama——" Her little face was drawn with compassion as she watched Sarah extricate the point. "It hurts you so," the child cooed tenderly. "Suck the blood away wid your mouth." She gazed up at her mother, the deepest solicitude in her lovely gray eyes, the gentlest love in her heart. Sarah gave no sign of appreciation.

Settled again at her work, Minnie timidly called to her mother from the sink, to which she had gone to wash away blood stains:

"Ma, kin I help you?"

"Help!" shouted Sarah angrily, adding, as if her decision were the result of deliberation: "You will *all* help. Your *easy* days are over, the days when your mother *alone* will slave. You are orphans. You *must* help." She dropped her eyes. "You stand back and call your mother a thief!" she concluded.

It was not Sarah, but Sarah's tongue, which spoke. How much more complex were her feelings; and how different was the language of her storm-tossed heart!

Minnie came closer to her mother and nestled against her unfriendly body.

"Ma, I didn' call you a thief; only Miss Lacey always says, too, we should always be honest."

"You always have some excuse to take you away from your mother and your sisters and brother. First it was Abie, now it is Miss Lacey—Cracey—Macey in that gentle charity——" Sarah's eyes gleamed with so strange

a light that Minnie moved away from her and presently went downstairs. Standing at the front door of the tenement, her thoughts wandered back to Henry Street and Abie. Where was he? The days of Henry Street seemed so long ago! Her "papa" sailed before her tearful vision. She stood bent and wrinkled—a little old woman of eight.

Sarah, left alone, applied herself even more zealously to her sewing. Several things accounted for her bitter mood. She had been reprimanded by the ever-scolding Miss Greenberg; Miss Kranz had passed her in the hall without greeting her; upon that had followed the strain of finding shops where buckram and wire could be bought, and the wearisomeness of learning to make the bands without instruction. Each difficulty brought fresh terrors; each fresh terror was fought with giant might. She was a quivering mass of raw nerves.

* * * * *

In a week Sarah began to solicit trade. She plodded from one millinery shop to another—from Grand Street to Division Street, from Division to Delancey. She solicited from every shop regardless of whether it had already disposed of its custom or not, offering prices more attractive than others, and, where she was denied, pleading: "I am a widow with four children and I must support them." Within a month she acquired a fair clientèle. The children were ordered to put their shoulders to the wheel. It became a busy household.

Mornings Sarah continued to work at the Charities, since the bird in the hand could not be lightly tossed aside, and she planned to remain one more week so as to assure a safe margin, then she would throw up the work and also refuse to take alms.

Before the week was up, however, a contretemps occurred to upset her arrangements. Mira, informed by one of Sarah's dissatisfied customers that Sarah had become her competitor, betook herself to the Mendel home early one morning and told Sarah for the second time in the course of their friendship just what she thought of her. And this time Mira did not forgive until the day of Sarah's funeral. The scene wholly unnerved Sarah. At the Charities work-room she was almost too unstrung to bear Miss Greenberg's bad humor and fault-finding. The climax came when Miss Kranz summoned her at closing time and announced that the Charities would withdraw their payment of her rent. The Charities had "smelt a rat" in Sarah's continued satisfaction with the pittance allowed her for her labors in the work-room, which, they knew, was insufficient for the full support of her family. As she did not cry out from the pinch of the small shoes, they concluded that she had an unacknowledged source of income. Miss Kranz, as she voiced her suspicion, observed Sarah's reaction as intently as if she were putting her through the Third Degree. Sarah was uninformed in the ways of the grafter, else she might have taken the precaution to avert this suspicion. She stared at Miss Kranz, her soul outraged and indignant, her body quivering from head to toe. Finally she took the plunge she had been longing to take all the months, safe margin or no safe margin.

"You nothing you——" she cried, "you independent nobody—you who would die of fright at the *remotest prospect* of enduring my hardships and suffering—you *dare* to stand there brazenly accusing me of swindling you for your dirty alms? Why, my fingers and heart burned at the very touch of it—I prayed for death to be

spared the humiliation—— You little, empty creature. . . . And that shrunken, dried-out Miss Greenberg is one of a pair with you. At home we would not have had you for our servants.”

Poor Sarah! In her outrage she grossly exaggerated the weaknesses of these people. She did not realize that they, as much as she, were the victims of an all-too-sorry system.

For years afterward, when Charity officials needed to cite a case of ingratitude (had they not rescued the woman from the very gutter?), Case No. 31100 was produced.

Sarah, for her part, flung the Charities far, far from her, and from that day concentrated on the bands business with the fierce determination with which men and animals fight in a life-and-death struggle.

PART III
BANDS

PART III

BANDS

Were not money restricted to its particular kind of speech, a certain one thousand dollars lying deposited in the Bowery Bank of New York City might have told an interesting tale of what it had done to disrupt a family of a mother and four children. But money is in honor bound to speak for and not against a family.

With the avarice of one whose soul has too long been starved of its needs, Sarah took to the making of money. As the first deposit of one hundred dollars in the bank was swelled by a second hundred dollars and this by a third, she was spurred on to lash herself and her children into ever greater activity in the bands' business.

Cutting, wiring, counting, packing, and selling filled the days. On no pretext was a child exempt from the daily duty assigned to it. Sarah stood over her offspring employees with an insistence verging on mania. If a child said it was ill, Sarah sensed pretense; in the claim that school lessons must be studied she saw only an attempt to shirk. The bands had to be manufactured above all.

"Do you want to go back to *Henry Street*? Do you want to be thrown out even of a cellar? Do you want to go to the Charities? Another time *you* will go. I have done enough for you." So she would shout down their other interests. Her vulgarity and aggressiveness cowed them into capitulation.

Five years had passed since Ida appropriated Mira's

sample. The family now occupied a five-room flat on Third Street, the East Side's Up Town of those days. The largest bedroom had been converted into a workshop. At one end mouldy, dusty buckram was piled to the ceiling, buckram that Sarah had purchased at a bargain from a small dealer for a sum far below what the regular buckram dealers charged, and as it served her purpose she took much pride in the discovery. "It would be mighty well for you," she often boasted to the children, "if you took after your mother in resourcefulness." The sill of the bespattered window in the room was stacked with wire; the floor was littered with pieces of waste buckram, wire, thread, paper and rolling wads of dust. Amid the chaos the children sat on homely wooden chairs with their backs bent, their faces sweaty and besmirched. Immediately after school, began the session for work, and it continued far into the night. Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays were distinguished by even longer hours of toil. They cut, they sewed, they counted and tied. At first they cut with inadequate shears and sewed by hand; then Sarah invested in sharper shears and a labor-saving machine. Though the children expected relief from these innovations, none came, for Sarah insisted on a greater output.

Indeed, soon they came to feel they had a "regular boss," not a mother; that their new and more spacious abode was not a home but a "regular shop," Jacob, a "regular operator," and the girls "regular shop girls." If they complained when Sarah happened to be in a tender mood she reasoned with them: "Kinderlech, money is an indispensable crutch in this world; without it you walk lame and everybody can come along and throw you over. That costs blood. Oh, how they spill your blood! If

by sweating a little you can walk firm on two feet, isn't it worth while? Come, don't be children. Listen to reason."

XL

Sarah's patrons included a Mrs. Tannenbaum, who was well acquainted with the millinery trade. Sympathizing with Sarah in her valiant struggle, she kept her informed of Mira's doings, of advance fashions, of new competitors, in fact, of all happenings in the small hat-dealers' world.

"There is a new man in the feather end come in from Chicago," she announced one day.

Sarah received the news with lukewarm interest. Her own specialty could not be affected by the intruder. Later in their talk Mrs. Tannenbaum referred to the man as a Mr. Pollack. Sarah startled, remained silent a perceptible moment, then asked for his first name.

"Leopold."

Could it possibly be Leopold Pollack of Memel, the tall, thin, sensitive Leopold Pollack of her girlhood, her free-thinker lover? The question dived through her heart like a swallow, in its downward sweep casting aside all of the sordid past that stood between them, and in its upward flight raising a full realization of a personal life closed and done with forever. A lump rose in Sarah's throat. She dropped her eyes, and sighed.

But how could Leopold Pollack have been in America long enough to go into business without her knowing it? To Sarah, business followed only upon a long preliminary struggle. Mrs. Tannenbaum's description of Leopold Pollack, however, agreed, on the whole, with the appear-

ance of the man she knew; and she was inclined rather to believe it was he.

"I knew him when I was a girl," she finally remarked, to explain her interest.

"You knew him when you were a girl? Wouldn't it be a joke if it were really he? And how funny I mentioned him!" Mrs. Tannenbaum chuckled. "It's sometimes the queerest thing how life works." She was keenly interested in the possible development of the romantic episode.

Sarah, for days, went about her work abstractedly, living over again scenes of her girlhood. She was listening to Leopold preaching atheism to her as they walked together in the woods, and anon he was kissing her, praising her gray eyes.

She would wrench herself away from these memories, angry with herself for her sentimentality, and force her mind to work in its usual way, in the way that took only the children into account, their education which was to insure them against economic stress such as she had known and make them what she had not been able to be. As for her own life, it was to be over with when these duties were accomplished. Her lot was to work up the business for the children's sake. But mixed with her thoughts was a vague disapprobation of the scheme of things, by which personal happiness, personal satisfaction in living were made impossible. She would compare her life to a desert—a stretch of nothingness, barren of all joyousness, desolate, except for a burning passion for the mountain heights of attainment.

In the meantime her millinery friend was working behind the scenes.

As Sarah stepped into Mrs. Tannenbaum's store one

day, she came face to face with Leopold. The world lost its reality and for a moment Sarah was bereft of her faculties. Her bag fell to the floor from her limp hand; she entwined her fingers as in prayer; tears gushed to her eyes.

"Leopold!" It was like a cry out of the dark.

A moment of profound silence, then the man, who had perceptibly aged and grown thinner, stepped forward, his sensitive lips quivering as he took Sarah into his arms.

"Sarah! For God's sake, Sarah!"

Eagerly they interrogated each other. When had he come to America? How was it he had not let her know of his coming? Surely some mutual acquaintance would have given him her address. How had he, too, happened to go into the millinery business?

Leopold satisfactorily answered all her questions.

When had *she* come to America? How had Elias fared? Dead! Four children? Had she had a struggle?

Leopold Pollack had begun life equipped with ideals which he had discarded in the shuffle. To the man who does not start out on a smooth platform already prepared for him, ideals may be a leaden encumbrance: at least Leopold found them so. Six years before, he had left Memel for South Africa where rich relatives had taken him into their narrow environment, and to fit into it he had been obliged to cramp his wings. Several years of discontent resolved him to quit. He came to America, where he tried his hand at customer-peddling, insurance, and what not. Just now, through a friend's "lift," he was endeavoring to set himself up in the feather business. His ideals were now replaced by a warm cynicism as to the greater advantages accruing the poor man in one

land as against another land; to be poor, he was convinced, was hell in the old country—to be poor was hell in the new country.

Sarah's feelings blended with his; her heart warmed with a sense of kinship for him and with gratification at the similarity in their development.

When they finally parted, Leopold walked away, feeling strangely young again. His step was brisker, his whole manner more alert. Sarah's eager interest in him, which she felt too greatly to mask, had fed his vanity. It had come like a fresh breeze in a sultry night, scattering the clouds of his cynicism. Sarah was not the girl he loved years ago, nevertheless she was a comely woman; in fact, he found himself thinking she had improved with the years.

She was, indeed, a very different Sarah from the Sarah of the Charities work-room. In her well-made, tailored suit she presented a fine full figure. Her neglected body had received the physician's and dentist's care; the former had rid her of her vermiform appendix, and, by the latter's art, her cheeks were no longer sunken. She radiated freshness and vivacity and might have been taken for a woman of not more than thirty years.

As the incidents of the meeting revolved in Leopold's mind, the love that had waned but had never been extinguished in his heart began to smoulder afresh. As he recalled their youthful clandestine meetings, an old void, which no other woman had ever filled, was pricked into existence again. Sarah was a widow. Perhaps the dream of his youth might still be realized. Who knew! Leopold shrugged his shoulders. The thought, "She even has a successful hat-bands' business," came to his mind and was swiftly dismissed. He himself had not been success-

ful; he did not seem to be cut out for the sordid business of buying and selling. He could not go about wearing the salesman's ready-made smile, simulating affability, dancing attendance on customers. He had not the tradesman's nature, and being a man he could not, like Sarah, adapt himself, the gift of adaptability being divinely vested in women.

Ruminating thus upon his flaccid career, he drifted into melancholy and regrets. Who could tell—had life not wrenched Sarah from him, how different it all might have been! He sighed. In an effort to shake off his oppressive feelings, he walked more rapidly, saying to himself:

"Wednesday, Thursday, Friday—three more days until we see each other again."

XLI

"Mama said a hundred times you shouldn't give the full gross," Ida insisted.

Minnie, drawing herself up, replied defiantly:

"I don't care what mama says. If I count I am going to count a full gross for each package. She isn't going to boss me about that. If you want to skin, go ahead."

"Listen to that disgusting thing. Calls mama a skin!"

Beckie (Bubbele of old) turned her head away from the machine over which she sat bent.

"Oh, stop fighting. You make me sick," she called, and busied herself again over the machine.

Minnie and Ida eyed each other like game-cocks. Then, as if better thoughts had come, they went on courting the bands.

Minnie's lips moved and articulated: "Hundred forty-

three, hundred forty-four." She had counted the full gross loud enough to be heard. "For spite," was Ida's interpretation. Anger born of dislike swelled her heart. The two girls were always at daggers' drawn. Ida, willingly unscrupulous, felt she was carrying out her mother's orders, while Minnie was exaggeratedly scrupulous because she could not be otherwise. And Ida saw spite in it, and the affectation of a "high-tone lady." She dashed the batch of bands from Minnie's hands and sent them scattering to the floor. The two confronted each other belligerently.

At this juncture the door opened and Sarah entered. She was returning from a long day's selling, tired and hot and perspiring. With the quick perception that time had cultivated, she noted that her daughters were quarreling. She sighed wearily.

"Mama," shrieked Ida, "I'm not going to work with her any more."

Sarah asked no questions. Minnie's eyes scornfully regarded her sister.

"Go on, *tell!*" she cried. "Maybe mama'll kill me." Tears of impotence gathered in her eyes. As in childhood, Minnie was still singularly lacking in controversial weapons of self-defense. Under attack her mind refused to function, and speech failed her. But when she knew she was right, she firmly, even if silently, held her ground. Her part in the family quarrels rarely extended beyond her refusal to carry out orders that were opposed to her principles. Unable to say more and unwilling to lose her self-control in their presence, she dropped the few bands in her hands and left the room.

She walked into the parlor, the room that chiefly bespoke the Mendels' affluence, with its suite of green plush

furniture, long looking-glass, pink silk tidy over the mantelpiece, green plush album, rose-patterned rug, stiff Nottingham lace curtains, and crudely colored, hand-painted portraits of Elias and Sarah's departed parents. Flinging herself into a rocking-chair, Minnie indulged in a brief shower of tears, then sat pondering on the sordidness of their family life and wondering why her mother had not, as usual, reprimanded her.

The reason was that Sarah had keenly detected that this was a quarrel about one of those points on which Minnie was inflexible; she had long ago decided that when it came to a question of real loyalty Minnie was not to be depended upon; never would she give a short count, never would she substitute the poorer grade of buckram for the better. Sarah had often sighed resignedly as does a housewife who, finding one decayed apple in her purchase of a quantity of otherwise excellent fruit, concludes to accept the bargain and not to hold it against the dealer.

This time, furthermore, feeling it was more expedient to propitiate Minnie, she followed her to the front room.

"I bought you a waist."

Minnie turned to face her mother standing in the door.
"Yes?"

Only that morning had Minnie complained that her one waist was out at the elbows, and here her mother had already bought her another waist! The girl, who had not expected such prompt attention to her need, was touched.

"Try it on."

While Minnie untied the parcel, Ida and Beckie sauntered in. A new garment for any member of the family, even after a rumpus, was a matter of general interest.

Minnie went to the pier glass, took off the waist she was wearing and put on the new one, of a dark red flannel with straight up and down rows of black soutache trimming; exactly to Minnie's taste. She was about to fasten it when Beckie stepped forward, raised Minnie's arm and said: "It's damaged, I think." "It is," agreed Ida. Sarah had bought the waist for twenty-nine cents! From the way she inspected it now one would have inferred that the stain on the sleeve was a surprise to her.

"I can't wear it," said Minnie, quickly slipping it off. She tossed it toward a chair, but it missed the mark and fell to the floor. Sarah was enraged. Not only had she failed to palm the waist off on Minnie, but she also detected, she thought, scorn of her thrift. Snatching the waist from the floor, she waved it as if to strike Minnie.

"You ungrateful worm, you, it doesn't suit you?"

The retort came so quickly that Minnie, wholly unprepared, was frightened, all the more so when, glancing into the looking-glass, she caught sight of her mother's distorted face. Without replying, she picked up her old waist and began to put it on. Her seeming unconcern added to Sarah's fury.

"You unappreciative pig, you," she cried. "I walked with blisters on my feet to get you a red waist, as you said you wanted, and now when I bring it, you throw it in my face."

This distorting of the fact, as well as the implication that the waist was unearned, sent a wave of deep resentment through Minnie and loosened her tongue for the moment.

"Don't I *work*?" she exploded.

"*Work!* All great big lumps like you work. What then—a *mother* should support you? But do you ever do more than you *have* to for the business, like the other children?" Sarah stopped for want of breath; however, her manner foretold there was more to come. "It *will soon all end*," she added, stressing each word with a peculiar intonation that struck all of them. Beckie, looking up in surprise, asked:

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind," said the mother, stalking out of the room, "it—will—soon—all—end!"

"What do you think she means?" Beckie whispered to Ida. Ida shrugged her shoulders. Minnie turned to the glass to finish dressing. The two girls went back to the work-room.

Minnie peered at her reflection. The glare of anger lingered in her large gray eyes under which the dark rings had deepened. She was paler than usual and looked troubled and unhappy. A lump stuck in her throat.

"You're sick of this," she communed with her image in the glass. "You'll give up high school and go to work in an office. . . . Maybe you'll even make enough money to give Jacob a little every week so he won't have to take from *her*. . . . It's always the bank, the bank! *We* don't count. . . . Buys a fire-stained waist on Baxter Street. All the girls at high school look nice. I should look like a beggar! . . . I don't do as much for the business as the others because—I don't cheat. They make me sick."

She dried her eyes, finished dressing, arranged her hair a little more becomingly, then went into the adjoining room.

At that moment the door opened, and Jacob entered, accompanied by another young man—Abie Ratkin.

XLII

At the beginning of a new term in the College of the City of New York, Jacob Mendel had several times during roll-call wondered, half unwillingly, when he heard Abraham Ratkin's name: "Can that be Abie Ratkin of Henry Street?" And Abraham Ratkin had wondered freely: "Can that be Minnie Mendel's brother?" Finally Abraham decided to note carefully whose deep-voiced "present" came in response to "Jacob Mendel." At the end of the session he looked up his new classmate. Immediately they recognized each other, and enjoyed a self-conscious, yet wholesome laugh together.

"See you at the end of the classes," said Abraham.

"All right."

As they walked out of the college building that afternoon Jacob asked Abraham to come home with him, assuring him the family would be glad to see him. Abraham, curious about Minnie, and as it was not out of his way to his own home, accepted.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" cried Minnie, with a light laugh. "If it isn't Abie Ratkin!"

Abraham reddened and stood for a moment fascinated. In contrast with the only women he knew, his plain, sober mother and sisters, Minnie appeared like a baffling enigma. This Minnie standing before him with her head thrown gracefully back on a long white neck was not the Minnie of Henry Street! Though Minnie had regular features, her charm lay rather in some subtle, haunting expression in her eyes, which were now alight with pleas-

ure. Unlike his mother's and sisters', her voice was low and musical; her manner soft and modest.

Hesitating only an instant, he approached and held out his hand as he joined in her laughter with a self-conscious, broad smile.

"Ma! Beck! Ida!" Minnie called excitedly. "Guess who's here! You'll never guess who's here."

The sudden amicable summons brought them quickly, all agog.

"Nu, *mein Gott*, Abie Ratkin!" Sarah cried: the two girls echoed her astonishment.

By a little coaxing he was prevailed upon to join them in a feast of tea, cookies, and jam.

"What is the news with your family?" Sarah asked with peculiar eagerness.

Abraham, still confused by the cordial reception and the unexpected, insistent invitation, permitted himself a moment in which to collect his thoughts.

"Well," he began, "let's see. My uncle, mama's brother, has taken very good care of us all these years. My sisters are both grown up and go to high school, and I go to college." Here he coughed over a crumb in his throat. Sarah, in constrained expectancy, awaited what he had to say next. Had his mother married again? That was what she wanted to know. The question of remarriage had been much in her mind of late. Leopold Pollack was courting her; and when the children seemed to be impervious to her discipline, marriage to Leopold held a promise of the best solution. It was this refuge she had had in mind when an hour earlier she had cried: "It will soon all end." The children, she felt at trying times, needed a man's discipline; she herself must be relieved; sewing, selling, managing all the details of a

home and a business were too much for one woman; and Leopold was right when he urged these considerations upon her. His persuasive powers were bringing her closer and closer to yielding. She even deluded herself into the belief that it was chiefly these considerations which were influencing her decision and not her heart's desire. Leopold that very day had been most persistent in his suit.

"So your mother never married again?" asked Sarah, looking away as if she intended that he alone should hear her question.

Abraham had a boy's pride in his mother. She had adapted herself gracefully to well-being, managed a servant with dignity, ran an orderly, comfortable home, and dressed in good style.

"Oh, no," he said, "why should she marry again? She is happy just with us. You ought to see her. She looks fine."

The boy, Sarah thought jealously, spoke with more enthusiasm of his mother than her children did of her, although she had slaved ten times harder for them. Small wonder that Abie's mother was happy. Perhaps had *she* had to manage all these years on her own capacity for work, she would not have found it so easy to remain without the protection of a man. But, as always when Sarah tried to argue herself into justifying her marriage with Leopold, another and a finer impulse held her back—fear that harm might result for her children.

As the girls conversed with Abraham, she listened abstractedly; her mind drifting to gray pictures of the time when the girls would be grown and have beaux, and Jacob would have his sweetheart. The business would then devolve even more heavily upon her; and later,

when they would leave to establish homes of their own. she would be lonely—left alone—that would be her reward.

"A penny for your thoughts," Abraham laughingly called to her, with a shy glance at Minnie for her approval of his jocularities.

Sarah dropped her eyes. It was as though Abie's mother with her old critical attitude were sitting there prying into her heart. "She would be ready to spit upon me as a wicked woman," passed through Sarah's mind. She felt ashamed, and selfish. In an impulsive desire to redeem herself, she coaxed Minnie, as if no altercation had occurred between them, to eat more cookies and put more milk in her tea. The blue rings under her daughter's eyes cut the mother to the heart.

"How do you think my girls look?" she asked Abraham with assumed gaiety.

Abraham laughingly proclaimed them all "beauties."

Beckie was a really lovely little girl, with shining blue eyes and curving baby lips that seemed always to say "kiss me, come kiss me." Ida, though the stamp of ill-nature was impressed on her face, had a curious piquancy. Her greatest beauty was her wealth of golden hair. Sarah, who knew her children were not cast in the ordinary mould, enjoyed an unspoken pride in them.

"But you," said Abraham, "you are so much better-looking. I would never have known you."

Sarah flushed; she made no reply. She was pleased; but at the same time she was hurt that her own children had never remarked on her improved appearance. Leopold had complimented her many times. If only her children were a little proud, a little fond of their mother,

she might find greater joy in living for them alone. She drew a deep sigh.

Soon Abraham rose to leave. Shaking hands with Minnie, he asked, with awkward facetiousness, if she wished to be called Miss Mendel or Mildred. She preferred plain Minnie. They laughed, while their young hearts fluttered with the self-consciousness of adolescence.

"Never would I have thought he would grow into such a nice young man," commented Sarah when Abraham had gone. But for the timorous, self-depreciative mood into which the visitor from the past had cast her, she would have told her son that he ought to speak as appreciatingly of *her* as Abraham had spoken of *his* mother.

XLIII

This visit was followed by others, but never again did Abraham find the family ready to entertain him at the tea-table. They remained in the work-room, harassed, quarreling. After the first two or three visits formality was discarded; he became again the Abie of Henry Street, in whose presence it was not necessary even to keep the current of irritation under cover. Remembering their quarrelsomeness of the old days, Abraham marveled that they had not yet outgrown it. With the exception of Minnie who, though she often raised her voice above the others, seemed to be just, they all annoyed him. And Minnie, he felt, ought not to be argumentative. It would have pleased him far better had she held herself in dignified silence. But he never could muster sufficient courage to tell her so.

After a time he resented his interest in the Mendels.

When he should have been concentrating on his studies, he found himself drifting off to thoughts of them; he would chide himself for bothering about other people's affairs. Yet he continued to call.

One Saturday, as he passed by their home, he casually dropped in. His knock at the door was answered by Minnie, who was at home alone. She had been lying on the lounge reading *Silas Marner*, so absorbed and rapt that she had to bring herself back as from another world, and was still dazed when she faced him at the door, and stared unknowingly. Then, in slight embarrassment, putting her hands up to her tumbling hair, she smiled and asked him in. Abraham, who swiftly took in that no one else was at home, said he wouldn't stay. "Ah, do," pleaded Minnie.

"I've been reading *Silas Marner*," she said, after they were seated, "and I was so absorbed—I felt all confused when the bell rang."

He smiled pleased approval of her reading.

"Have you read *Silas Marner*, too?"

"Oh, yes."

"Did you like it?"

"It is one of the purest gems of fiction."

Though Minnie did not quite grasp the meaning of his pedantic reply, she was happy nevertheless to have someone to talk to about things other than hat-bands—about something that really interested her. She plied him with a multitude of questions.

Whom did he like best, George Eliot, Dickens or Thackeray? What reading was required at college? Here she sighed. Would she ever find time to read so much? Did Latin become easier or harder as you went on? She was just beginning *Cæsar*; it was terribly hard.

It would come easier? That was good. Did one ever learn to read Latin as easily as English? What course was he taking? Science? What did he expect to become? A teacher! Minnie looked at him, half smiling, and meeting an answering smile, wondered whether he remembered her childish proviso. She couldn't tell. She dropped her eyes.

All her further questions concerned his personal experiences and ambitions. She received his confidences with the absorption of one drinking from a fount of wisdom; and the subtle flattery of her manner gave him extreme pleasure. His heart swelled with pride and he flushed.

That evening he found it impossible to concentrate on his studies. Pictures of Minnie blotted out the printed page. The quiet and the Sabbath cleanliness of the home had added an impressiveness to her personality. Her girlhood somehow seemed to have been vivified. She disturbed his peace of mind. For days he went about pensive, silent, struggling. Finally, one night, after an earnest debate with himself, the student won out. His marks would suffer from such distractions—he would never, never see Minnie again.

Abie's renewal of friendship with the Mendels had caused Mrs. Ratkin many a restless night upon her hair mattress. Such things had been known to happen—childhood friends married. Abie ought to look higher. He himself had told her the family still quarreled. How profoundly she hoped it would not happen! It would be such a come-down—Henry Street all over again. When Abraham seemed to have stopped calling she felt like one reborn. But she would make quite certain—and she would know the reason why as well.

"They are very nice children," (she had visited them

once) "why don't you go?" she asked, cleverly hitting upon the one ruse that was sure to draw her son out. She watched him closely. He dropped his eyes.

"I don't like them, they quarrel," he said with a surge of irritation, eager to evade talk on the subject.

Mrs. Ratkin was grateful and happy. It is ever thus with the mothers of men when the Minnies begin their shadow-dance.

* * * * *

Minnie, busy with her lessons and the bands, gave no serious thought to Abraham's sudden neglect. But the others made conjectures.

"Did you ask him again?" they inquired of Jacob.

Yes, he had, but Abraham had so persistently refused that he had ceased to ask him.

"It's because every time he came there was a fight," Beckie was sure. One blamed the other.

To Sarah the end of Abraham's visits marked the end of a period of self-torture. He had seemed to point a steady finger of warning. When Mrs. Ratkin had come to pay her single visit, Sarah was roused to such a vivid consciousness of the torrent of nasty criticism that would flow round her were she to defy the conventions set for respectable motherhood that she cast aside the thought of remarriage, yet held on, as it were, by one finger. Then, when weeks passed with no reminder from the outside world to dog her, she once more breathed freely.

XLIV

"You *are*!" cried Minnie, in whose heart and memory her father lived ever sacred.

The mother faced her children, pale and quivering,

yet with an outward show of self-confidence and dignity. She had just informed them that she would soon bring the regular visitor, upon whom they had looked as only "mama's friend from Europe," to take their father's place in the home.

Jacob, at once, saw a home full of "new" children. He shuddered, turned color, rose from his chair, threw his mother an inquiring glance as if unable to comprehend her boldness, and scampered out of the house. He hated to confront complications, he hated controversies, he hated neighbors.

Sarah refrained from evincing resentment. Her heart demanded that her children kiss her, congratulate her, be glad that she might at last get her measure of happiness. But in a minor key her heart also cried: "They are only children, they do not understand anything except what concerns themselves.

"Yes, children," she said, in a low, unsteady voice, repeating what she had rehearsed over and over again, "I am a woman, alone. I have worked hard for you. I am getting older. You are getting older. You will go your own way soon. I will be left alone. When you reach my age, you will understand." Feeling self-control slipping from her, she swallowed hard. "I have known Leopold Pollack from girlhood—long before I knew your father. He will be good to you—treat you as his own children—if you will only be good—stop quarreling—and willingly help with the bands." She gave way and broke into tears.

As Minnie hesitated between the impulse to run to her mother and the impulse to run out of the house, her eyes lighted upon her father's portrait. Her mother stood

before her a disloyal woman, unsacred. She rushed to the door and out of the house.

Beckie and Ida, troubled by the cloud which had so unexpectedly descended upon them, silently gazed out of the window.

Sarah left, and toward evening returned with Leopold. The hours traveled into the night, yet Leopold remained. The children met in corners, in the hall, on the stairs. They whispered, wondered, marvelled. They looked furtively at their mother, believing they must discover something strange, something they had never seen in her before. Apparently she was the same, except that her eyes darted nervously now from the children to Leopold, now from Leopold to them.

At last Leopold called them to him. Speaking gently, he promised that their interest would be his concern; he would be their father. Tears were in his eyes as he asked them to accept him.

A solemn silence fell. The atmosphere held the gravity of gathering clouds. Sarah, and then the girls, began to weep. Jacob walked out of the room.

* * * * *

It was not Leopold Pollack's intention to install himself as the domineering autocrat in the Mendel home. On the contrary, he wanted to be a real father to the children. They had been allowed to grow up like weeds, it was his opinion, and for their own good as well as the good of the household and the business he meant to teach them to be orderly, obedient, willing and well-behaved.

Leopold, as most people who do not understand children, forgot that his meditated improvements would have to be effected through the medium of young living mat-

ter. As soon as the early self-consciousness wore off, he rolled up his shirt sleeves and launched upon his task of reconstruction.

The children instantly sensed innovation and ruffled up their feathers.

The work-room window was filthy, he remarked, removing the wire from the sill and glancing from one to the other, to gather which of the three children was the most docile. Fixing upon little Beckie, he asked her courteously to bring a pail of water, a clean cloth and seat herself on the sill, pull the window to her lap and wash the outside of the glass. Beckie gave her "big" sister Minnie a swift look of appeal. The little ten-year-old had never before been called upon to clean windows. She was, if anything, small for her age; her feet, when she sat out, would reach only a little below the sill.

Minnie flushed, dropped her eyes and told Leopold there was danger in Beckie's sitting out, she herself would wash the window. Leopold tried to conceal his annoyance at this interference. Nonsense, Beckie was not too small; Minnie would see that Beckie could do it; he would hold on to her skirt from the inside; it was well for Beckie to learn to clean windows; some day she would be a married lady. Beckie smiled. Minnie frowned. Married lady! Beckie was still a baby. Minnie had always encouraged the child to depend upon her for a mother's care, because their mother was always busy. She turned her back on Leopold while Beckie fetched the pail of water and cloth and sat out to wash the window. Contrary to his promise, Leopold did not hold on to her skirt. Minnie waited a moment or two, then rose from counting bands, went over to Beckie and stood clutching her. When the task was done, the child looked heated

and tired. Minnie herself washed the inside of the window. Leopold was exasperated, though he said nothing. He conceived a slight dislike for Minnie. Out of his pent-up feelings burst a brusque order to Beckie to settle herself at sewing. The child started and turned hastily to obey. Minnie's color heightened with a pang of pity for Beckie and resentment against the stepfather. This man, she meditated, evidently expected to "carry on" that way always. Her spirit rose in revolt. She would see to it that he dropped his "bossing."

Minor irritations arose constantly. Minnie's mutinous spirit found almost daily fuel to feed on, while the two younger children became more and more intimidated and were kept in a constant nervous tremor. It got so that Minnie bore a positive antipathy toward this man who dared to order them around; she hated his "matter-of-fact" way; his obliviousness of Beckie's youth riled her. He had "nerve" to exact a definite output from Beckie! *Anything* Beckie accomplished was commendable. If their *mama* insisted, that was different. But he! Why, Beckie was a kid—a baby. Anyway, what had *he* to say? He was not a boss! It was their *mama's* business. They had worked the business up without him. He ought to "mind his own affairs."

On complaining to her mother, Minnie was vastly astonished that Sarah defended the man. Her mother must be going crazy.

Minnie solicited sympathetic indignation from Jacob. But Jacob, who was too busy with his college work to be intimately concerned with these work-room squabbles, received her confidences at first in silence, then with protests that she was to "let him alone." In his secret heart, however, the boy resented both Leopold and his mother.

How had his mother dared to marry now when her children were all grown up! Ugh!

As time passed Leopold assumed the more familiar right to improve the girls' manners as well. They must lower their voices, be civil to each other. Beckie and Ida submitted, retreating to corners, from which they emerged red-eyed and whispering fretfully, but stopping short if ever there was danger of Leopold's overhearing.

"Why don't you *talk?*" Of what are you afraid?" Minnie would shout to rouse a spirit of defiance in them. She could have kicked Leopold, spat on him, dug her nails into him. Her whole nature, apparently, was changing from timidity to aggressiveness.

Sarah made mute appeals to Minnie to control herself, while she turned pleading eyes on Leopold. When Leopold was out of hearing, she would *order* Minnie to learn to hold her tongue; when the children were out of hearing, she would implore Leopold to change his tactics. Each resisted. *Indeed* Minnie would not let him boss them, she *wouldn't*. She hated him. Leopold, in turn, gave Sarah a bitter dose to swallow by telling her she had raised wild animals; small wonder he was having the devil's own time of it. If the dose failed in its curative effect, he would charge her with abetting the children into defying him, and hinted that under such circumstances there was no use for him to try any longer to bring order out of the chaos; he might as well quit. That would throw poor Sarah into a panic. If Leopold were to desert her she would be exposed to public ridicule—to unendurable shame. The thought would bring the goose-flesh to her skin; and in this state she would pounce on Minnie, abusively insist upon her behaving

properly, threaten that her step-father "would throw her out of the house," and declare he would be justified in doing so; while at the same time her heart would writhe in agony as she watched the pallor spread over her daughter's face and heard her unnaturally shrill shrieks. Her mother, Minnie would charge, cared nothing about the children. She, in a conspiracy with "that man," wanted to drive them all out of the house. Leopold was a lazy fellow who had come to "sponge" on them because he could not make a living for himself. She would rather die than permit him to overwork little Beckie or frighten the life out of Ida, who trembled when she heard his footsteps. If she, their mother, did not care, she, their sister, did.

At these charges against her motherhood, Sarah's blood would boil. Minnie, she would shout in a rage, was a wild, wild animal—took the liberties of a brazen hussy—belonged by rights to the sort of mother who sent her children out to work in sweat-shops to support their mother. Minnie didn't deserve a mother who slaved to let her go to high school. . . . Then the unbearable sight of her daughter's greenish pallor would drive Sarah out of the room, apparently hissing anger, while Minnie would hurl after her: "I don't *have* to work in a shop; I know how to read and write, and I'm not dumb or dull. If you think you're threatening me, you can be sure you're not; this house is a regular hell."

During one such quarrel Minnie went into hysterics. Sarah, terrified, ran to her, implored her to control herself. Minnie, from actual aversion, pushed her away, shrieking that she should go to "that man"; her feelings for her children were not genuine.

For some time thereafter mother and daughter scarcely

exchanged a word. Minnie went about constantly watching for any show of "meanness," and Sarah brooded miserably. Then came a big order for bands.

* * * * *

The work-room hummed with activity. Beckie had been running the machine until her back ached. In choosing her last batch of bands, she deliberately discriminated against those which were cut from the poor grade of buckram because they had "lumps" and "bumps" and were hard to sew. Leopold, noticing her selection, snatched them away from her and demanded roughly: "Don't you know we must use up the damaged buckram?" Beckie threw Minnie a swift, imploring look. "I won't let her do it!" burst upon Minnie's mind. Her heart began to hammer. She seized the bands Leopold had substituted and handed the better ones back to Beckie. Her chest heaving, she stood defying Leopold and her mother with her eyes. Sarah frowned menacingly. Beckie, frightened, put down the better bands and picked up the others which Minnie, in turn, tore away from her, ready to hurl an insult at her sister, when she observed the child's pallor and the alarm in her eyes. Poor little Beckie! She was scared! For a moment Minnie was held by a surge of pity. Then it occurred to her that they were *all* scared—that Jacob was a shirker, always dodging issues.

"Beckie!" she cried threateningly, and tried to force the better bands upon her.

Sarah stepped hastily forward, snatched the bands away from Minnie and cried in a low voice:

"You are a busybody—an ungrateful, unwilling child. You don't appreciate your uncle who does his best for you."

"Sit down and work!" Leopold shouted at Beckie simultaneously.

His shout sent a spasm of resentment through the mother's heart, yet she turned to Minnie and cried with equal roughness: "You sit down, too!"

"I *won't!*" Minnie shrieked, on the verge of hysterics, her heart thumping. She could have strangled both her mother and Leopold. "And I won't let Beckie hurt her hands either." She tore the bands away from Beckie again and, holding them up to Leopold, cried: "You're a husky man, *you* work on these bands." And with that she hurled them at him.

Leopold showed that the girl had gone too far.

Sarah, terrified, divided one swift look between the two. Her heart cried in anguish: "God, what will be the end of it all!"

"She ought to be thrown out of the house," raged Leopold. "She ought to have to knock around in sweat-shops like thousands of other girls!"

She work in a shop! Minnie's heart flamed with contempt and indignation. It was the ugliest, bitterest insult. Only ignorant foreign girls worked in shops. She, a high-school girl, who aspired to a college education, whom Sarah herself had picked out to be a doctor, a lawyer, *she* to work in a shop!

"Shut up!" she hissed at Leopold.

He raised a hand to strike her, but dropped it, aghast, suddenly realizing the extreme pass to which things had come. He had never foreseen such dire consequences from his innocent measures of reform. Sarah's ashen face, as she stood in the middle of the room wringing her hands, Minnie's shrill shouting, Beckie's tearfulness, struck tragedy into his heart.

Minnie shouted: "Don't you *dare* to——" wildly incensed at his intention to strike her and almost more wildly incensed that her mother stood by "complacently." "I hate you! You're a *mean* man. I *hate* you!" she yelled. "I won't stay here any longer. You can stay with your wife, and you can both work the children to death like slaves to swell your bank account. That's what you want. I hate you—both of you!"

With a furious look, she grabbed up her hat and school books and tore out of the house.

XLV

A dark, heavy silence fell upon Sarah and Leopold when the door closed on Minnie. With a swift look at each other, they turned and left the room, Sarah going into the parlor where she collapsed in a chair, and Leopold going into the bedroom where he stayed a few moments puttering around. Now and then he glanced surreptitiously into the parlor at Sarah's dejected figure. Soon he returned to the work-room. At the end of a half-hour he could bear his restrained excitement no longer; he picked up his hat and was about to go out.

"Where are you going?" called Sarah, starting up, full of misgivings.

"Out," he said, avoiding her eyes. This announcement of the obvious angered Sarah. She turned her head away, flushed, and muttered under her breath: "Go! All of you!"

He went.

She sat down again and stared with unseeing eyes through the window, while her mind went round in a whirl. Such a daughter as she had brought up, such a

daughter! Let her go—let her stay away! As if she had any place to go to, as if she had the spunk to shift for herself! Was ever a mother so cursed with such a stubborn, wilful child? Not even *this* would teach her a lesson. She would come home still of the same obstinate spirit. Forever they would continue—these fights—these discouraging, these disgusting scenes as if they were a low, Polish set. . . . Sarah heaved a deep sigh. . . . What had she done to deserve such a fate? In the great world other women married, too, but the stepfathers and children got along, and the homes were nice, quiet, pleasant. Never had *she* known peace—not as a wife—not as a mother. “If only she would stay away it would really be a solution.” The thought, hardly framed, filled Sarah with shame, like a virgin who has allowed herself to think unchastely.

She rose and began to stir around the house, followed by the shadow of her conflicting feelings. She wondered where Leopold could have gone, when he would return, and whether the two would come back at the same time. “If Minnie,” she thought, “would come later or sooner, it would be better.” Every now and then a panicky feeling that, if Minnie did carry out her threat, people would condemn her, call her a bad mother, beset her heart; but she lulled herself with the assurance that the girl had no other refuge. . . . “*Always* it has been Minnie. All the quarrels—all the worry—all the ugliness of the family relationship from time immemorial—*she* caused. Always, even as a child, from the time when I sent her to Mira for the band, she has stood out obstinately opposed to everything I have done.” Sarah’s heart was resentful, but her heart also ached for her child.

She looked at the clock. Leopold had been gone two hours already. She was seized by a nervous fear that he might not come back at all.

Supper preparations were completed. She set the table, then went back to the parlor window. Ten minutes later Leopold opened the door. Little did he know what relief stirred in Sarah's soul.

During supper no mention was made of Minnie, though the eyes of each frequently traveled to the door. After supper the family sat round in an unsettled state, and as the evening wore on and no Minnie appeared, their eyes mutely questioned one another; their faces fell into troubled lines; all listened eagerly for footsteps in the hall. Leopold, unable to bear the sight of Sarah's anguish, went to bed.

At ten o'clock Beckie and Ida followed his example. Jacob sat up until midnight ostensibly studying. Then he, too, retired.

Sarah began to pace up and down the room, wringing her hands and muttering lamentations. At two o'clock in the morning Leopold appeared on the threshold and urged her to go to bed.

"Go away!" she cried. He went.

At the first break of dawn Sarah leaned out of the front window. One moment she was frantic with concern *for* Minnie, the next moment she was frantic *against* Minnie. The chords of her heart played a double tune, but she listened mostly to the mother-string. When her family rose early in the morning, they found her worn and wan, an object of misery.

Days passed, and still no Minnie. Sometimes, when Sarah was overcome with fear that something awful might have happened to her, she would entertain plans

for locating her—going to the police station, or advertising in the newspaper. But dread of the publicity involved in such steps would hold her back. In her dilemma she would resent the girl's conduct as outrageous, unheard of, deserving of *any* evil reward and would pity herself that she who had worked her fingers to callous flesh and sweated and bled for her children, should be treated so by her oldest daughter. In this frame of mind she would grow quite indifferent to Minnie; but, ashamed of her indifference, afraid the others would perceive it, she would give exaggerated outward manifestations of grief, going about mute and glum and taking every occasion to throw harsh words at Leopold. The children, distressed on her account, would encourage her by prophesying Minnie's return, if not that day, then the next. "Go away," Sarah would shout at them, "you do not care a bit about your sister."

When Jacob, however, who at first manifested his indignation at Leopold by maintaining silence, burst out one day charging him with a rascal's success and also picked up and left, Sarah was shaken down to her normal self. Her conduct, she perceived clearly, had resulted in a fresh calamity. She became at once more talkative and cheerful, and showed Leopold wifely attentions. Oddly enough, from now on she began to worry about her daughter undividedly. She went to Wadleigh High School and the Queen's Daughters in the hope of discovering her whereabouts. Minnie had ceased to attend both places. Sarah came back home with a haunted heart.

BOOK II
MINNIE

PART I
INDEPENDENCE

PART I

INDEPENDENCE

The night of Sarah's vigil Minnie spent in a home on Rivington Street, the home of two Dakowsky sisters, one of whom, Dora, she had met at the Queen's Daughters. She knew they kept boarders in their five-room flat and had a stepmother; both of which considerations impelled her to go there, as they would probably have room for her and also—with a stepparent of their own—sympathy. She was right. Dora did proffer sympathy and a third of the bed that she and her sister shared—provided the stepmother did not object.

The worn, wrinkled little woman consented only after a good deal of persuading by Dora, who, eager to gladden her friend's heart, ran back to the bedroom, where she had left Minnie and where they had sat deploring the cruelty of stepparents. According to Mrs. Dakowsky's dictates, the rental of the one-third of bed was to be one dollar a month; breakfast, of coffee, a roll and cheese or smoked salmon, was to be five cents; luncheons she would not provide because she helped her husband in his butcher shop; and supper, of good soup, meat, pickle and bread, was to be fifteen cents, except on Fridays, when the price was twenty-five cents because of a more elaborate menu.

In detailing this price-list Dora quite innocently raised up a mountain of anxiety in front of Minnie, who lis-

tened appalled. Dora did not know, and Minnie had forgotten, that she had no money. They looked at each other aghast and were about to drop into gloom when an idea struck Dora. She jumped up in excited glee, clapping her hands. The five men boarders had often expressed a desire for a competent person to teach them English. Minnie could teach them! That would solve Minnie's problem and theirs, too. Dora tingled with delight.

"What do they do?" Minnie asked.

"Two of them are cloak operators, one a finisher, and Louis is a painter."

When the men were gathered about the kitchen table, Mrs. Dakowsky serving them with a "tub" of soup and a pan of meat, each of which she pronounced far too good for the Czar of Russia, Minnie and Dora, arms around each other's waists, entered as gracefully as débutantes in a ballroom.

"Meet my friend Miss Mendel." Dora did the honors. "She's a high-school girl. She'll teach you English. Now ain't that lovely?" she ended emphatically, nodding her head in rhythm with her tone.

The men were impressed. Before long they came to terms. The lessons were to be given in class form three times a week and were to cost fifteen cents a person per lesson.

With the most careful economy, this income could not be stretched to meet a week's needs. Minnie had to do without lunches. If hunger too inconsiderately thrust itself upon her at lunch time, she yielded and ruled out supper. This irregularity provoked Mrs. Dakowsky, who complained that by the time Minnie discovered her disinclination for the evening meal she had already invested in

the viands. It was agreed, therefore, that Minnie should be registered for a supper every other night and be permitted to partake of one-half of it at a time, the other half to be allowed storage room in the ice-box until the next night, when she would complete its consumption. A pesky arrangement; but Mrs. Dakowsky knew how it was with the girl, and, not being a heartless woman, suffered it to continue, thinking privately that Minnie ought to throw up high school and go to work. She hoped Minnie would at least get additional pupils, so that she could settle down to a regular supper on each of God's regular nights.

Minnie earnestly hoped for the same; her abstentions were doing her no special good either. She was getting to feel rather weak and shaky at the knees. She told Dora so, who said, innocently enough: "You can surely get work in a shop—why don't you give up high school?"

A shop! Minnie turned upon her with eyes glaring indignation.

Dora, abashed, remembering Minnie's experience with her stepfather, apologized. Of course she ought to have remembered that shop work was beneath Minnie. For a day or two, however, the relations between the two were strained. It was bad enough, Minnie felt, that she had been compelled to descend to the East Side again. But to have Dora, her friend, suggest a shop as a solution! Leopold was probably saying that she was already working in a shop!

II

Two of Minnie's pupils were of the sort who laugh loudest at coarse jokes and revel in suggestiveness. Louis

the "paintner," who was often caught gaping at the long, white neck of the teacher and looking with fascinated eyes at her slender white hand as it wrote the letters of the alphabet, was their special butt. They would pass remarks about him in audible whispers, break out into vulgar laughter, and, with knowing looks, dig each other in the ribs.

Minnie, too young and inexperienced to ignore them, would, in her ingenuousness, inquire interestedly into the cause of their hilarity, and then find herself embarrassed, blushing, stammering, stuttering, and utterly miserable. After a time she hit upon the happy idea of intimating that they were wasting their money in thus idling their time away, and this gave them pause. They brought their pencils to their mouths, and worked industriously the rest of the evening. After that, except on rare occasions, things went better; it was only when the teacher was out of hearing that they teased "the paintner."

Louis' roughness of manner was refreshing rather than offensive. He was loud-spoken, but mild-worded. He laughed thunderously, but with an accompanying embarrassment that seemed to muffle the sound. He had the gentle consideration that is clumsy in the act but so sincere in expression that it evokes only appreciation. He was big and burly, with hands always paint-smeared and clothes redolent and shining with the stuff of his trade.

Minnie appealed to him by the law of opposites. Although under stress she had deteriorated into the aggressive and assertive Minnie that the stepfather knew, the real Minnie was gentle, low-voiced, mild-mannered and shy.

Louis learned from the missus of the establishment how it happened that Minnie had come to live among

them—a mean mother, for the sake of a strange man, had driven the girl out. He learned also of the reason for her absences from table at meal times. The latter knowledge gave him much concern. He had the sympathetic nature that feels with all suffering. If he met a crippled beggar on the street, he would be unhappy for days. There are some people like Louis still left in the world. He suggested to the other pupils that since they were so well satisfied they should increase the tuition fee to twenty-five cents. One of the basting-pullers did not take kindly to the idea. He clapped his hand on a bony knee and pursed his lips.

“No sir! If she said fifteen cents, then it is fifteen cents. If she will raise the price herself, then she will raise the price, but we shouldn’t suggest it,” he said disagreeably.

Louis then hit upon the scheme of retiring from the class and becoming a private “scholner.”

It was obvious, however, that Louis’ small raise did not carry Minnie far, for she absented herself from meals just the same and looked even more pinched and pale. Then Louis secretly advised her to raise her rates. She deserved it, he told her emphatically. Minnie was embarrassed and stammered something to the effect that the men were paying enough, and Louis felt compelled to drop the subject.

III

Minnie had just left her books in the office of the Wadleigh High School and was standing aimlessly in the vestibule, with that void in her heart, that agonized feel-

ing of "what next?" which only the peace-loving who are condemned to be storm-tossed know.

It was done, and now school was over forever. What would her mother say if she knew? What would "he" say? For the first time the anger in which she had left home and which had supported her during all the weeks, forsook her. The tears came instead, and she wondered whether her family had actually expected and wished her to stay away, whether they were really indifferent as to what became of her. Had they tried to find her? "I might just as well be dead as far as they are concerned. If any of *them* had disappeared, I would have searched high and low to find them."

Classes were dismissed, and girls began to pass in files through the vestibule. Minnie dried her eyes and stole out on to the street. She drew a deep breath as if to prepare herself to face a great, big world. The first thing she would do, she decided, would be to go from office to office of the doctors and lawyers in the vicinity of Rivington Street. In that neighborhood there was less danger of detection by anyone who knew her, and, besides, she would save carfares.

She had no luck that day. The doctors and lawyers all required some funny asset called "shorthand" and dismissed her peremptorily because of her ignorance of that pesky subject, as if her high-school education amounted to nothing and her excellent handwriting were a worthless trifle, when, as a matter of fact, it was the one thing that she felt safeguarded her against the compulsion to work in a shop.

Fearful that her great disappointment might submerge her, she egged herself on to take comfort in the hope of better luck the next day.

In the evening, after the class of the Dakowsky boarders and private instruction of Louis, she took him into her confidence. He, too, was of the mind that the sun would shine on the morrow. Her obvious anxiety so pained him that he managed between hems and haws to intimate that he would be ever so glad to lend her at least five dollars until matters mended themselves. She shrank from his offer as if it held indelible dishonor, thereby causing him great embarrassment. He puckered his forehead and examined his black-rimmed fingernails like a sensitive boy.

Early the next morning she started out breakfastless on another job-hunting expedition, with the same empty result. Nor did she have better success the following day, or the day after that. But the failure of her efforts only increased the fierceness of her determination: she was not Sarah's daughter for nothing.

One day she strayed by mistake into the office of a physician on whom she had already called. He had been busy with patients and had dismissed her peremptorily. Minnie, on opening the door, instantly perceived her error, and drew back.

"Oh, excuse me, I've been here before."

The young man, who was not busy now, gave her a quizzical look and asked her to come in.

Flushing with excitement and the anticipation of success, Minnie closed the door and stepped timidly yet eagerly forward.

He drew a chair out. "Be seated," he said, affecting the manner of an older man. Then he swung his swivel chair round to face his desk. After a pause, during which his eyes rested intently on a paper on which he was scribbling, he cleared his throat and spoke again.

"You were here before asking for work?" He went on scribbling.

"Yes."

"Been asking other doctors for work?"

"Yes."

Another pause; then, turning from the paper suddenly, he flashed his eyes at her.

"Look here, girlie," he began, "you ought to be sitting on your mother's lap instead of hunting work."

The advice came so unexpectedly and was such a damper on her eagerness, that Minnie could only stare at him, a feverish brilliancy in her great gray eyes. He looked into them as though he were searching for his own image in a looking-glass. Then he brought his lips together as though he were satisfied with what he had seen and turned to his desk again. Instantly, however, he faced about once more and regarded the girl with a superior, though faintly amused, smile round his lips and in his eyes.

"Have you a mother?"

She hesitated. She had a mother in the flesh, but not in the spirit.

"No," she replied.

He was apparently interested.

"A father?"

"No."

"What have you been doing?"

"I have been going to high school."

"When did you leave?"

"Lately."

"Where do you live?"

"With a friend—a girl friend."

The young man noted her addition, "a *girl* friend,"

and regarded her steadfastly, as if to interpret her soul, wondering how much she knew.

"Do you think," he asked, assuming a grave air, "that it is very nice for a girl to go around from office to office looking for work?" He used the word "nice," though he meant "safe."

Minnie looked uncomprehending.

"Isn't it nice? Is it like begging?"

"No, oh, no," he answered reassuringly, "not begging——" He leaned forward in his chair, his breath beginning to come short.

"Come, little girl," he said in a lowered voice with a paternal note in it, "sit down on my knee, and I'll tell you something you ought to know."

Minnie hesitated. He looked her straight in the eyes. Though her knowledge of sex propriety was limited and no one would have been more astonished than she to learn that there was any danger in doing what the doctor asked, her instinct told her that to sit on a man's knee was somehow not right.

"Uh, no," she gasped, shrinking back in her chair.

The doctor leaned back. He suspected that Minnie knew. He assumed again the manner of a busy man.

"Well, step in again to-morrow," he said brusquely. "Perhaps I will ask a friend whether he needs a girl in his office." He turned in his chair and bent over his desk, pen in hand.

Minnie rose, a sense of deep calamity possessing her. Had she lost an opportunity for work by refusing to sit on the doctor's knee? She could have bit off her tongue. Attempting to cover up her agitation, she said:

"I—I did not mean to—to insult you. I'm not——" her intuition suggested the right word—"afraid."

The young man manifested an electric interest. He lifted his eyes quickly and, seeing that the girl was quite serious, rose, placed his arm around her uncorseted waist, drew her, unresisting, to his chair, and seated her on his knee.

"Well, now, that's a nice girl," he said wheedlingly, as one entices a shy animal. He made an effort to control the trembling of his limbs.

Minnie's heart was beating from an indefinable fear; and, somehow, she felt ashamed.

The doctor silently ran his hand up and down her loins over her clothes, several times gently, then less gently, and finally pressed her to him ardently, his breath coming thick and short.

Minnie was amazed at this, and her young face expressed puzzled inquiry. Ashamed, the doctor loosened his hold and pretended to have the toothache. But the next moment he completely abandoned himself; he crushed her to him with all his strength, fumbling at the same time with her skirts.

A rap sounded. He released her with lightning rapidity. It was the janitor who came to know if the doctor had found the key he had lost. Yes, the doctor had found the key—the words were spoken with an effort and with suppressed annoyance.

The interruption sent Minnie hurrying to the door. If only she could get out before the janitor was gone! A foreboding of evil was in her heart. She was so—so frightened! But before she reached the door, the doctor found time to say: "Wait, little girl," and in the mean-

time the janitor disappeared. The doctor stepped toward her. She stood clutching the door-knob.

"Don't be afraid," he said softly, looking hard at her. She made no reply.

"I didn't hurt you," he half asserted, half asked.

Embarrassed and perplexed at her own alarm, she stood with her hand playing nervously with the door-knob, the tears gathering in her eyes.

"No——" came from her, timidly.

"Well, now, show me you are not afraid by coming to-morrow and I will give you all the money you need until you find work. Just to be a nice girl." He swung his hands and raised his shoulders nonchalantly, at the same time scrutinizing her sharply.

Minnie made no reply.

"You're not afraid of me?" he half asked again.

She turned large eyes up to him. He had convinced her.

"No," she replied naively, "why should I be?"

He was greatly pleased.

"Of course you're not," he assured her, and added in a low voice: "But don't tell anybody what——" he hesitated. She looked questioningly at him—"that——" he hesitated again, then quickly went on: "Well, what we do together is nobody's business"—his breath came thick again, his eyes grew cloudy—"and just don't tell anybody. There, now, shake hands, and promise."

She held out her hand.

"No, I won't tell anybody," she promised; "it's none of my business."

The doctor suppressed a chuckle. He shook her hand.

"Well, now, come to-morrow and show me that you're

not afraid, and I'll see what I can do for you." He took her to the outer door.

The words held a promise of work and Minnie felt, despite everything, hopeful.

IV

It was late in the afternoon. Minnie had made the rounds of almost all the remaining offices in the vicinity, and was reduced to the helplessness of one drowning. *Would* she have to go to a shop after all? Surely, there *must* be some office where her high-school education would stand her in good stead! There was the doctor. A voice within her, a weak one, to be sure, warned her not to approach him. Yet he *might* have a position for her.

Between the fear of going to him and the impelling force of desperation, she turned toward his office as unthinkingly as a bird in its seasonal migration. She simply walked and found herself there. Half stupefied she entered. The doctor looked up from his desk.

"Oh, so! Come in and sit down." He pushed a chair towards her, his tone and manner implying that he had found what he had been looking for. As soon as she was seated he began with assumed earnestness, "Well—now—I have spoken to my friend, but he already has an office girl. However, give me your name and address and if I hear of anything else, I will let you know."

"Mildred Mendel."

He wrote, repeating:

"Mildred Mendel—a very nice sounding name. Where do you live?"

"Rivington Street." She gave the number.

"You live with a friend, don't you?"

"Yes. Dora Dakowsky."

"D-a-k-o-w-s-k-y. Are you Russian?"

"No, I'm German—that is, my mama speaks——"

She halted and blushed.

The doctor noticed her embarrassment, but deemed it best to make no comment.

As he seemed to have no more questions to ask, Minnie rose to go; and the doctor, assuming preoccupation, said:

"Yes, I am very busy."

Minnie closed the door behind her and left the young man biting his fingernails.

* * * * *

He had no position for her! She elbowed her way back to Rivington Street through the mad throng of people, each jostling the other in a fierce effort to arrive as quickly as possible at his destination. Her heart ached with a corroding sense of aloneness. Nothing seemed real. The incessant, dinning stir on the street had no relation to her; these people seemed busy with happiness. Purgatory had spilled its contents upon her heart alone. All was hopeless—black for her. First the doctor told her to come every day and promised to give her all the money she needed until she found work; now he seemed to have forgotten all about it. No, he hadn't forgotten; he just hadn't meant what he said in the first place. She had been afraid of him because he had taken her on his knee. How foolish she had been. Why, he did not even remember that he had done so. He had forgotten her, like her mother, who didn't give a snap of her fingers whether her child lived or died; nor did her sisters.

And her stepfather *wanted* her to die. She wanted to die herself. What was the use of living?

It was an aged little woman of not much over fifteen who taught the Dakowsky boarders that night and, later, listened to the advice of Louis "the paintner" to try the "Help Wanted—Female" columns of the *New York World*. This she conscientiously did, but without results.

Every road has a turning where the sun may be shining. So it seemed to Minnie when the next morning she found a postcard in the letter-box addressed to her.

"*Hochgeschätztes Fräulein,*" the card began, and went on to say that if she would come to the office of the doctor, she would learn something of interest to her.

She ran to his office as if a brake had been lifted from off her being and left her no longer subject to her own volition. She arrived with cheeks flushed, and dark rings under her eyes, her lips blue.

"Well, hello there!" the doctor greeted her as if she were an old pal. His cordiality only emphasized her loneliness. The tears rushed to her eyes; the floor seemed to rise and sink. She wanted to cling to him and beg him never to desert her, to tell him she was afraid of life. But she only dropped silently into the chair he offered.

"Well, that's a nice girl——"

She burst out crying.

Sincerely astonished and affected, the doctor leaned forward and touched her gently on the knee.

"What's the matter, little girl?" The tenderness of his voice only made her weep the more. Raising her from the chair, he took her on his knee, removed her hat, stroked her hair, kissed her, petted her, called her a "sweet girl," "a nice child."

"I'll give you money," he said tenderly. "Will five dollars help you? You haven't had enough to eat in weeks." He felt her fleshless hips and ribs to confirm the truth of his observation. In a moment, however, he set her on her feet and, forcing a five-dollar bill in her hand, dismissed her, bidding her, as if against his will, to come again at the same hour the next day.

She came the next day and the next and the next. It seemed as if he would never tire of holding her on his knee, now pressing her tight, now releasing her, then kissing and pinching her as if to nip off a piece of flesh to keep. Minnie could not understand it at all. But, since nothing happened to her, she grew less afraid, and was all the more satisfied when on asking for office work he told her that what she was doing was what he required. He paid her fifty cents a day and kept her only a short time. It solved the problem of her living. She even grew happy.

But some instinct warned her not to mention her visits to the Dakowsky household. The increase in her income she attributed to a new "scholar"; which produced general pleasure, especially as she appeared at table for both supper and breakfast.

But the sun must go down even after a new rising. One day the doctor wanted to know how tall she was. A good method was the comparative one, standing back to back, then front to front before a long looking-glass. But this was not accurate enough for the man of science; a better way, he thought, was to lie down on the couch, each in turn, and let the other mark head and foot in pencil. Minnie entered vivaciously into the suggestion like a child into an interesting game. But when she lay stretched out on the couch and he suddenly took her in

his arms and smothered her with fierce kisses so that she felt her breath leaving her, she screamed. The doctor released her in disgust.

Like a mouse stealing back to its hiding, she slunk out on the street and ran and ran until she reached Rivington Street.

V

She would have to tell somebody, or else something in her head would snap. Wherever she turned, the doctor's blazing eyes stared at her like two ghosts, and in the stillness she heard his labored breathing. Suddenly, without warning, someone would take her in great big arms and press the breath out of her. She was afraid of noises, she was afraid of the quiet. She started when spoken to, and in the silence heard her own thoughts uttered out loud, and was terrified lest someone hear them.

The following evening, while giving Louis his lesson, she most unexpectedly burst into tears and with the frankness of the innocent and guileless told him everything. She made one intimate confession after another, wholly unconscious that the man she was talking to was as much of a stranger to her as the doctor.

Louis could not credit his ears. He was simply amazed at such naïvete in these days of precociousness. He told her, trying to keep his tone dispassionate, that she had done right to scream and run away and must never again go to the doctor, or to any man who might treat her like that.

Her intuitions thus borne out, she felt relieved and yet, somehow, more frightened.

Louis' eyes thereafter followed her gestures with a

look in them that had not been there before. Her confession had suddenly made him more alive to her physical presence, and also awoke in him a sense of proprietorship, which led him from now on to invite her to go out walking and to question her freely, as though he had a right to know, all about her family and personal affairs. She refused to say where her family lived. He insisted that the confidence was due him, even commanded her dictatorially to tell; but Minnie, afraid he might divulge her stress to her people, successfully held out against him.

The money difficulty rose again like a monster now that the income from the doctor was curtailed. Louis, as they were out walking one evening, insisted that she take money from him. She refused. Near the tenement, he drew a five-dollar bill from his pocket and thrust it down the bosom of her dress. In the contact he experienced an exquisite sense of desire. He hurried her into the hall and up the stairs, keeping several paces behind and discouraging her attempts to face about and return the money.

Every night for a week they took walks, ostensibly for her to have a chance to communicate her day's experiences to Louis, whom she would tell of her attempts and failures with the disconsolateness of a child. When the prospects for office employment seemed very dull, Louis suggested work in a shop. "It will do temporarily," he said. "Something else may turn up later." Minnie gave him a queer look. But what had become of her resentment?

They were passing a vacant lot, which was opposite the Mendel home and to which Minnie had led Louis every night. She fancied that if a light shone through the window, all was well with those at home. If there

was no light, she tortured herself and spent a restless night. This evening there was no light, so that gloomy misgivings mingled with her distress over her own situation, and she walked beside Louis, brooding. Was anyone sick? Was anyone hurt? Was Beckie all right? Poor little Beckie, how hard she worked! And Ida, too. How well the children could use a little more money than their mother allowed them. She, Minnie, might be the provider of that little more money if she took work in a shop. . . . Her soul had found its straw and clung to it. She began to form rosy visions of herself as the good Samaritan. . . . But soon an ugly voice hooted—"A shop! A shop!" She shuddered. Her blasted career! A heaviness settled upon her young heart. She had aspired to a college education and a profession. She saw now that life was hard and fate defrauding.

Louis wondered at her silence and her tearfulness.

"I hope he dies!" she suddenly muttered, gritting her teeth.

"What did you say?" Louis asked.

"I hope my stepfather dies!" she said, then fell again into stubborn silence.

Sometimes Louis the "paintner" could not make Minnie out. She might be suspected of having "state secrets." She was a queer girl.

VI

One morning Louis awoke with a headache. Emerging from the front room, which he shared with another boarder, to make the railroad-car trip through the flat to the kitchen for his breakfast, he passed through the

room adjoining occupied by the girls. Dora and her sister were up, but Minnie still lay asleep, her bare arms raised over her head, her long hair strewn over both shoulders, her lips slightly parted. An expression of candor and innocence made her face lovely in repose. Louis hurried on through the next room occupied by two more boarders, through Mr. and Mrs. Dakowsky's bedroom, to the kitchen, where the fifth boarder slept.

After breakfast all the boarders except Louis left for work; he lingered, divided between the inclination to give the day to nursing his not very severe headache and the inclination to disregard it and go to work. The tempter won. He remained at home. Then Louis was torn by two conflicting hopes, that the missus would leave to help her husband in the butcher shop and that she would not leave.

When he reached Minnie's room on his way back to bed, she had turned to one side, and her white neck and chest were exposed. Slipping into his own room hastily, he shut the door tight and lay down. Soon he was asleep.

Minnie awoke at half-past seven. She put on the barest amount of clothing, and hastened out for a copy of the *New York World*. Mrs. Dakowsky left at the same time for the butcher shop. "Put a shawl over your head; it's raining," she said. Minnie disregarded her advice, as there was a news-stand close by. But this news-stand had already sold all its copies of the *World*, and she had to go a long block to and fro in the rain, and came back drenched.

Standing before the looking-glass in the bedroom, she removed her outer clothes and let down her hair to dry. Suddenly the door of the front room opened, and

the reflection of Louis appeared in the glass. She gasped. He shut the door hastily. Rummaging nervously for a dry blouse in a box on the floor, which contained her worldly possessions, she put it on quickly, pinned her hair up, and hurried out of the room into the kitchen, where she spread the newspaper on the table and tried to fix her attention upon the help-wanted columns.

If only it weren't raining, she reflected, she would go right out so as not to have to meet Louis again. She was sure he had seen her, and she was sure he shouldn't have seen her with her waist off. But maybe he hadn't seen her, maybe he had shut the door so excitedly because she had screamed. Oh, it made her sick—everything had to happen to her. . . . But he was only Louis the "paintner"; it didn't matter. Yet she was not convinced that it did not matter.

Louis, in shirt sleeves, soon appeared in the kitchen. He said good morning gruffly, with averted eyes, and went straight to the sink to wash himself. Her eyes followed him to the front room, to which he returned for the towel he had forgotten. He remained behind the closed door about five minutes, then reappeared in the kitchen.

Minnie, her heart palpitating, summoned up enough self-possession to inquire how he came to be at home. He explained, still avoiding her eyes. As there was a purplish flush on his large face and deep rings under his eyes, Minnie concluded that he had a "splitting headache," the only kind, according to her notions, that justified one in staying away from work. She grew sympathetic.

"I wish I could do something for you," she said, though it was hard for her to speak because Louis seemed greatly

constrained and acted as if he preferred not to have to look at her.

"You could rub my forehead, or kiss it," he suggested, smiling. "Kiss" recalled the doctor and Louis' own advice. Louis observed her change color and to reassure her, added jokingly: "That's what they do for children—kiss them where it hurts." She dropped her eyes, and for a while there was silence. "What are you doing?" he asked, moving closer to the table, though wishing he could keep away. He fumbled with an edge of the newspaper. "It's too rainy to-day for you to go out. Stay right home," he said. She looked out of the window. The rain was coming down in sheets. He moved still closer and leaned over the newspaper. "Let's see," he said, "what kind of a teacher you are by the way I can read the paper." He read laboriously, stumbling over the "ths" until Minnie, tired of repeating corrections, tore the paper away from him and told him, laughingly, to "stop bothering" her. Louis flushed, and in his turn snatched the paper away from her. They laughed into each other's eyes. Minnie grabbed for the paper. Louis, holding it out of her reach, got up from his chair and let a surreptitious, covetous glance sweep over the graceful lines of her young figure. He dangled the paper just out of her reach, and they wrestled and laughed, until suddenly, to her amazement, Minnie felt herself enfolded in the mighty arms of Louis, who stifled her with kisses and murmured breathlessly:

"I love you—I love you—I love——"

She struggled like an animal in a trap, twisting and turning in his embrace and hitting out at random—here—there—with her fists, against his shoulders, his chin, his ear, his neck, his mouth, and finally, without knowing

what she was doing, giving him a blow in the eye. At shock of the pain he loosened his hold, and she wrenched herself free and rushed from the house.

VII

She dashed pellmell up one street and down another, tears of terror choking her. The whole world seemed traitor and all strangers hateful, and in the eyes of all she saw evil design lurking. She was gripped by a frenzied desire to see her sisters—her mother! anyone not a hard cruel stranger. Like one gone mad she ran to the school that Ida and Beckie attended and stationed herself in a vestibule of a house opposite from where she breathlessly watched the school exits. In the violence of her fright and in the face of greater disloyalty her family loomed up as loyalty incarnate. One's own, one's own! How hateful strangers were!

Three long hours passed, and still she stood waiting. A whole day seemed to be going by. By the time the lunch gong sounded, her eyes were fairly popping from her head. At last the gates opened, and children began to emerge. Minnie craned her neck and fairly devoured each child form with her gaze. Finally the right one flashed upon her.

"Beckie! Beckie!" she called wildly.

At the sound of her name Beckie looked around in bewilderment. The moment seemed endless to Minnie. Then Beckie's eyes lighted upon her sister waving her hand frantically, and she darted across the street into her arms.

"Where *are* you all the time?" There was the babyish plaintiveness in her voice that Minnie loved. She stroked Beckie's hair and pressed her cheek against hers passionately murmuring tender nothings.

"Mama is looking for you all the time, and she cries——" said Beckie.

So her mother had been worrying about her after all? Minnie felt a brief glow of satisfaction, instantly dissipated by regret that her mother, too, had suffered.

"Does mama look for me?" she asked.

"She did; she don't no more," said Beckie, who sensed Minnie's pain and meant to spare her.

Minnie's heart sank. She had been gone so long, she reflected bitterly, that her absence no longer mattered. Tears for herself hung on her eyelids.

"How is Jacob?" she brought out presently.

"He left the house for good. He's by Uncle David." Uncle David was the sympathetic relative who had befriended the family in past years.

The news fairly staggered Minnie and convinced her that their mother *was* no longer a mother; she cared for no one but Leopold. A sickening sense of utter desertion seized the girl.

"How does Uncle Leopold treat *you*?"

Beckie rolled her eyes to express contempt and complaint.

"He's a regular foreman. I hate him."

"Goodness," Minnie cried, "so he still makes you work too hard?"

Beckie nodded her head.

"I've accomplished nothing by going away!" cut sharp as a dagger through Minnie's consciousness.

"There's Ida," cried Beckie, spying her sister. "Ida! Ida!" she called.

Ida, though as surprised as Beckie had been to see Minnie, crossed the street leisurely. She had made up her mind long ago that if by any chance she met her run-away sister she would ignore her.

"Beckie," she said, with her eyes studiously turned away from Minnie, "come home to dinner. It's late already."

Minnie stepped toward her.

"Ida, aren't you glad to see me?"

"No," Ida cried, "you abused mama and ran away to have it easy and we got to do your work, too."

It had never occurred to Minnie that such an interpretation could be put upon her conduct. She was struck dumb.

Ida took hold of Beckie's hand to pull her away.

"I—thought—he would be better to you——" Minnie at last managed to say, hardly conscious that she was speaking.

"Better? We got to do *your* work now, too. Better!" Ida was vastly contemptuous. "Come on," she cried, jerking at Beckie.

Minnie recovered some of her self-possession.

"Go on, Beckie dear," she said huskily, "you'll be late for dinner." Through the tears in her eyes the two girls were merged into one, in the shape of Louis.

Beckie, lingering with Minnie, cried:

"I want to stay by you."

"No,——" Minnie could say no more.

Ida forced Beckie down the steps.

"You'll hurt her!" Minnie called.

"Yeh, and if she has to do *your work*, it *don't* hurt her?"

Minnie looked down on Ida with something in her eyes that compelled attention.

"You mustn't say that, Ida," she said, "I took your part—it's wrong——"

"Highfalutin talk! Crazy, high-tone lady!" interrupted Ida. "Come on, Beckie!" Beckie threw Minnie a kiss and called: "Come to see me soon again." Minnie nodded her head. She watched the small, retreating figures with a leaden heart. When they were out of sight, a bleak sense of utter aloneness overpowered her. With heavy steps, drearily, getting drenched to the skin, she retraced her steps to the Rivington Street tenement, where her space on the Dakowsky pillow was paid for.

VIII

Sarah's heart gave one great leap of relief when Ida and Beckie brought their news.

Minnie had even behaved like a "high-tone lady" and had said "highfalutin" things, Ida told her. Sure signs of normality. How happy the mother felt, what balm came to her heart! She laughed and wiped tears from her eyes.

But had Ida or Beckie got her address? No? How had it not occurred to them to get it? Such childish forgetfulness! However, Minnie was alive and well. Nothing else mattered much. They would probably see her again. Then they must not fail to get her address.

Once more the sky looked blue to Sarah. It was possible to shed tears of gratitude as a change from tears of

grief. Her happiness showed in kindness to the children and deference to Leopold. When she visited Jacob, she took him into her confidence upon this matter and that with an eagerness as if he were a newly discovered pal.

IX

Left alone, Louis, in terrible remorse, restlessly paced up and down the length of the railroad flat. The heavy flesh of his face had fallen into massive wrinkles, and his small eyes, glistening with unshed tears, seemed even smaller. Burly Louis, so innately gentle that he would not have hurt the meanest thing, had mortally offended his "teacherin!" He bit his lips in mortification and wished he could live the last few hours over again. Finally the creak of his heavy boots on the bare floors irritated his nerves, and he seated himself on a chair in the kitchen and chewed his black-rimmed finger-nails, as he gazed hard at a bit of dark sky visible from the tenement window. The childlike face of frightened Minnie haunted him; he was full of shame, was disgusted with himself, particularly when he recalled the warning he had given her against the doctor. And his helplessness to undo his evil deed, to set himself right again in her eyes, filled him with anguish.

Passing his big paint-smeared hand across his eyes to dry them, he rose and went out of the house. In the ground-floor hall he drew out his bluish-white handkerchief and wiped his eyes again, then, hiding his hands in his pockets out of disgust with the sight of his own flesh, he went to the front door and glanced up and down the street. No Minnie to be seen. After a long vigil he went in search of her, looking into doorways and up and down

cross streets. The rain penetrated his light-weight suit, and after he had gone a number of blocks he returned to his room and stationed himself at the window to watch for each passerby. After another long vigil, he went downstairs again. At last, from the vestibule, he saw Minnie returning slowly, her wet clothes clinging to her slight frame. His heart began a nervous turmoil and he wondered what he ought to do, whether to let her see him or to hide. He hid behind the stairs.

Minnie lingered at the curb in front of the house, afraid to go in. The rain came down in torrents. Finally, with a convulsive shudder, she went into the vestibule and leaned wearily against the side wall. She stood so still for so long a time that Louis peeped warily from out of his hiding-place to assure himself that she was there. He rubbed his large hands in and out of each other; the lines of his face deepened with loathing of himself and the instinct that had betrayed his better self.

A fierce gust swept the vestibule. Minnie drew hastily into the hall. In the suddenness of her movement, a dizziness that she had felt before but only faintly, came upon her with force. She groaned, staggered to the stairs, and sank down.

"What's the matter?" Louis cried, rushing from his hiding-place and bending over her.

His voice came from a great distance—it was not real—all reality merged in a black blur. Louis shook Minnie with trembling hands. She came to in a few moments and looked up at him. Her deathly pallor agonized him. He gathered her up in his arms and carried her to the flat, where he placed her on the lounge, rubbed her with vinegar and dashed cold water in her face. When she came to, she drew away from him in alarm.

"Don't be afraid," he pleaded, with such earnestness and such an honest shining of his eyes that her wits played her false, and she wondered whether she had dreamed the morning's incident. Then Ida was the one who was saying: "Don't be afraid." Louis' burly self seemed to be in her sister's guise. "Don't be afraid," Ida kept saying.

Louis used a quantity of vinegar that would have overcome a dozen faints. He got ice from the ice-box and applied it with masculine awkwardness to her temples; and when she was recovered, he helped her to her fraction of a bed, where, left alone, too tired, too sick to think, she fell into a heavy sleep.

X

At the supper table, to prevent suspicion of their strained relationship, Louis was, for him, garrulous. Had anyone else, he asked, observed what a pretty young lady they had with them? When had she applied the paint?—a reference to Minnie's flushed cheeks. He winked at her out of sheer awkwardness and caused general amusement. Did they all notice how silent she could be when she had nothing to say, and was there greater wisdom than that?

When she happened to look up at him, he turned his eyes away quickly, with a pained expression.

After supper he invited her, as usual, to take a walk with him, brushing aside her hesitation in the dictatorial way he had assumed.

"Go on, go, get your hat," he said, touching her on the elbow.

Mrs. Dakowsky, looking on, wished it was Dora that was Louis "the paintner's" favorite.

On the street Louis at once communicated to Minnie a plan at which he had arrived while she was sleeping off her indisposition and he was keeping strictly in the kitchen, careful not to pass through her room even for a badly needed handkerchief. She ought to move from the Dakowskys', was his verdict; sleeping with two others in a small bed in a small room was no life. This eating once and skipping twice was nothing short of lunacy. She should live with friends of his on Madison Street, who had no other boarders and only one child and would treat her well.

While he was giving this altruistic advice, a voice within said: "You yourself should go away. By a pretended favor to her you are removing temptation from yourself. Strangers are strangers all over. For no money Mrs. Argush will be no better than Mrs. Dakowsky. Sleeping in the kitchen of a two-room tenement is as bad as one-third of a bed in a bedroom. But Louis rooted this sentimentality out of his mind. Since he and Minnie could not stay under the same roof without danger to both of them, the one to move might as well be the younger person, to whom a change did not mean so great a hardship.

To Minnie—perverse is human nature—the wretched Dakowsky habitation when about to be denied her rose desirable as a palace and as hard to part from as life itself. She turned pale and quivered. To go again to a strange home loomed up as a horror and she repented, oh, so earnestly, anything she might have done to provoke Louis into taking such a stringent measure for her punishment.

She turned a mournful, pinched face up to him, making a heart-rending sight, from which he had to avert his eyes. With mingled emotions he guided her, nevertheless, against a raw, biting wind, to Madison Street, where he stopped in front of a closed shop. "You had better stand in the doorway," he said, "safe from the wind. I will go to see if my friends are still up. It is after ten o'clock and they may just be in bed." She was too choked to assent or dissent; and when he returned presently with the information that the Argushes were up and she was accepted as a boarder, she hung her head and followed him dumbly.

A familiar aspect of the vestibule roused her from her lethargy. She hung back from Louis, her heart beating rapidly, and tried to make out the blurred numbers on the door. There could be no mistaking them—they were worn, but the same—it was *The House of the Schlopoborsky Cellar!* She clapped her hand to her eyes and screamed. Louis faced round quickly.

"What's the matter? Does anything hurt you?"

She was alarmed into docility.

"Nothing—nothing hurts me." Louis was relieved. "The wind is blowing hard," he said and, taking her by the elbow, led her in.

XI

Most of her bag and baggage being on her person and Louis undertaking to explain to the Dakowsky missus, there was no reason, all agreed, why Minnie should not remain with the Argushes that very night.

Louis had prepared the good Argushes to meet a girl

"smart like anything," but as Minnie's monosyllabic replies hardly bore out his boast, he felt obliged to explain. "Wait," he said, "till she sleeps herself out. You will see, she is as smart as I say." Minnie lowered her eyes as he smiled upon her. Mr. Argush, spitting out threads of tobacco from the end of his cigarette and scattering the smoke, laughed a merry laugh, his face wrinkling and dimpling. In Louis' protectiveness of Minnie he saw the huge joke of matrimonial intent.

Minnie yawned. Mr. Argush pulled out his big gold watch by its heavy gold chain and held it up to Louis. If Minnie, he said, was to have the chance to "sleep herself out" into her greater "smartness," Louis had better let her go to bed; whereupon Louis, in preparation for departure, spat out the remnant of his cigarette into the sink. On the way to the door he smuggled a five-dollar bill into Mrs. Argush's hand and asked her in a whisper to insist upon Minnie's eating. He left, urging Minnie to feel at home.

After a moment of stiff silence—the moment of readjustment—Mrs. Argush proposed that she and her husband immediately remove from under the bed in the bedroom the cot upon which Minnie was to sleep in the room-of-all-affairs. She lighted a candle and held it for him while he, on his knees, proceeded to shove aside one obstructing article after another. Mrs. Argush's chiding of him for making too much noise—she was afraid the baby in the crib would be awakened—made Minnie quiver with the agony of a sensitive intruder. At last the cot was extricated from the tangle under the bed. Mr. Argush, scrambling up, called his wife's attention to the melted grease trickling down her apron from the lighted candle, and whisked her under the chin.

Mrs. Argush blew out the candle, put it away in a closet over the sink, and the two energetically proceeded to push the table and the chairs to one side to make room for the cot.

Minnie, hovering rather than sitting on her chair, was tortured as to whether or not she should help; she might only be in the way if she did; and if she didn't, they might think she was unwilling. Each moment her sensitiveness heightened, for they were having difficulty with the cot; the legs at one end set up, the legs at the other end shut down. At last it was adjusted and the perspiring Mr. Argush and his spouse turned to go to the bedroom, he to disrobe, she to weed out spare bedding for Minnie.

They had scarcely reached the threshold of the other room when the cot crumpled up with a bang. With a resigned sigh they turned back.

"Oh, it's going to be a big bother to you!" cried Minnie, who had started from her seat in the keenest distress.

For a moment—a moment of torture to Minnie—they were too preoccupied to reply. Then they cried in duet with great sincerity: "No, no!"

"Nu, *sure* it's no bother. What kind of a bother?" added Mr. Argush. "Does the cot ask for food? Does the landlord want extra rent? Is this room not wholly to spare?" He raised his laughing eyes to Minnie; she was set at rest. Mr. and Mrs. Argush were not yet possessors of so much as to feel that they had nothing to spare.

The cot once more planted on its four legs, Mr. Argush tested it with his full weight. Satisfied it was now secure, Mrs. Argush brought bedding; and with a kind

good-night to Minnie, husband and wife retired to their six-feet square of privacy.

* * * * *

Nothing but the flooring under her feet separated Minnie from the Schlopoborsky cellar! She marveled at this with youthful intensity. If her mother *only* knew! Oh, goodness, what in the world was going to happen to her next! Louis had had no right to bring her here. But he did not know it was the house of the Schlopoborsky cellar. Why hadn't she told him? Why could she make a hullabaloo when others were concerned and always remained dumb for herself?

As she raised her hand to turn out the gas-light, her burning eyes were caught by a bright calendar on which a gaudy, bare-bosomed young woman advertised Necessity Biscuits of the Titanic Biscuit Company; and after she had gone to bed the vision danced before her in the dark in brilliant shades of red and yellow until she fell into a doze, from which she awoke in a few minutes with a start, tearing herself from the arms of Louis and straining her neck to keep her lips out of reach of his fierce kisses. She lay awake for some time, so nervous that she dared not turn on her bed. Then she fell asleep again, and wrestled throughout the night with Necessity Biscuits, brazen, bare-bosomed women, Louis, cots tumbling from great heights to great depths, a cold stove in a gray cellar, home, mother, Ida, bands, high school.

XII

She awoke early in the morning and lay quietly in bed while recollections of the previous day and night

filtered through her mind, faint, at first, blurred, unreal, then with greater vividness, until her brain was entirely cleared of her troubled sleep and the reality, hard and bitter, thrust itself upon her. She could no longer teach the Dakowsky boarders; consequently she would have no source of income; so what in the world was to become of her? She stared blankly into space, her whole being enveloped in a cloud. All seemed utterly hopeless, and she utterly helpless. From sheer impotence she turned from side to side upon the cot. Again her eyes fell upon the brazen, bare-bosomed lady of the Titanic Biscuit Company calendar. She studied it mechanically. In the lower left-hand corner was the picture of a huge plant; in the lower right-hand corner, of an office with girls bending over desks. An unconscious something kept her eyes riveted on the right-hand corner. An inspiration dived through her mind. She would try to get a position in that office! "I'll get right up——" But she was afraid of rousing the Argushes. Then came a counter-fear; the Argushes might insist upon her eating breakfast even though she had no money to pay for it; and, determined to avoid this, she jumped up and began to dress. Just as she was ready to leave, Mrs. Argush, in her night regalia of a torn waist and a skimpy petticoat, appeared upon the threshold between the two rooms.

"What are you doing up so early?" she whispered, stepping farther into the room-of-all-affairs.

Minnie timidly imparted her intentions.

"But it's too early, it's only six o'clock."

Even if it was too early to go out, she had somehow to escape consumption of a breakfast without pay.

"Maybe it's not so early," she replied nervously, moving toward the door.

The baby stirred. Mrs. Argush turned to listen. Minnie slipped out, and was already at the hall door when Mrs. Argush discovered her flight and called in astonishment:

"You haven't eaten any breakfast."

There! What a satisfaction to have escaped!

"I don't want breakfast. Good-by!"

Mrs. Argush remained staring at the closed door.

"*A meen mudner mensch!*" (a queer person) she muttered, and returned to her spouse and baby, puzzled by Louis' choice.

Outdoors a fresh breeze was blowing. The streets wore an air of Sabbath cleanliness, and to the early hour was due a peaceful quiet. Here and there an energetic housewife appeared in a doorway with a can of ashes or rubbish to deposit in a barrel, and here and there a toiler in a "busy season" trade emerged to go to work. Scared by the silence and the gray light, Minnie walked cautiously, as if to avoid drawing attention to herself. The sight of a policeman swinging his club to the whistled tune of *Annie Laurie*, reminded her that she needed to be directed to the Titanic Biscuit Company. The big man's eyes twinkled down on the timid little questioner.

"Je fall out of bed?"

The joke missed Minnie, who, completely possessed by this new possibility of obtaining office work, was in no mood for fun.

The factory was at the extreme West Side of the metropolis, and by the time Minnie reached the place, her excitement, mounting with each step she took, had risen to fever heat.

A timid knocking on his office door roused the super-

intendent of the Titanic Biscuit Company. He turned his heavy body on the revolving-chair and called: "Come in." Minnie started back at the sight of the man facing her. His chin and lower jaw, protruding like a slightly open drawer, gave him the ferocious aspect of the proverbial villain. "Come in, come in," he growled, rubbing a rheumatic leg, which that morning had serious designs against the serenity of his temper. She advanced into the room and stood like a sinner on Judgment Day before this Almighty. "Well, what do you want?" he growled again. That mean leg would get the better of him and inject gruffness into his voice though he meant to be pleasant to the timid child.

"Work—work in your office."

"Got any experience?"

"No, sir."

He seemed to measure the impertinence of her request for work in an office against her youthful body, which shrank under his gaze. She was ready to run, to cry out when she was startled by a sharp sound. The gentleman had rung a bell. She looked to the right and to the left for a means of escape from the policeman summoned to throw her out. She trembled from head to foot.

"We have no position for you in the office, we can give you work in the factory. Experience not needed. Satisfied?"

Minnie, not knowing what she did, nodded.

The door opened. A man of immense size, with sleeves rolled up displaying tremendous muscles, appeared.

"Charlie," the Almighty grunted, "take this girl to the icing department." He turned to Minnie. "You'll get three dollars and a half a week," he tossed out, and swung his chair around again to his desk.

Simultaneously Charlie asked her to step along with him; she felt as if she were being spun round like a top; and before she realized what was happening the immense man was leading her through a huge iron gate, which made her shudder with a sense of her insignificance. He sped on through a hallway and up six flights of stone stairs. Minnie, trying to keep pace, reached the top sick with breathlessness.

"Dying?" Charlie, amused, turned round to inquire.

Tears welled up in her averted eyes. She said nothing.

Charlie slapped his pockets one after another, then slapped them all over again, and seemed upset about something. The sight of Pem, the keyman, who happened to pass at that moment, relieved him.

"Say, Pem," he called, "give's a key."

Pem took a key from his pocket. With a suggestive smile he held Minnie stripped before the gaze of Charlie as he dangled the key in the air. Then he threw it, aiming at Charlie's head. Both men laughed as Charlie caught the key and called "son-of-a-gun" to the retreating Pem. Minnie dropped her eyes and recoiled as though a foul smell had reached her.

Shrinkingly she followed Charlie to a time-clock. Pretending he had to help her reach the crank, he held her up under the armpits. As soon as she could, she freed herself from his hold.

"You must do that every morning. You're docked a cent a minute for being late, so git here on time, or the boss'll be making wages on you. See?" He chuckled and pursed his lips as if to spit. Minnie giving no sign

of appreciation of his joke, he decided she was a "stiff" and made no further advances. He always tested every good-looking newcomer. This kid's eyes kind a fetched him.

Charlie led her to Mr. Camely, the foreman of the icing department, who turned her over to the forelady. The forelady placed her at a table to arrange biscuits in straight rows on large boards, the boards to be mounted on racks, the racks to be pushed to a far end of the huge loft.

Minnie listened to the forelady's instructions with the solemnity with which an earnest bride listens to her wedding sermon. She was awe-inspired by the lady's dignity, and, at the same time, so distracted by the agonizing realization that the place was a *shop* that she had to strain every nerve to keep her mind from wandering. A haggard child's face was turned up to the forelady.

"The girls are not allowed to loiter in the water-closet," the dignified forelady continued, "and you mustn't talk or sit down, or you'll get the sack."

"When should I come in?" Minnie, gulping, asked timidly.

"At seven. You get a half-hour for dinner, and at six o'clock the whistle blows."

Subdued noises reached the forelady's ear. She turned like a dog catching a scent. An Italian workman, amusing himself and those around him by a hummed rendition of *Il Trovatore*, instantly feigned intensive concentration upon his task of sticking rectangular cakes dipped in colored icings on to iron spikes. Another man, who was about to yield to temptation and sit down to ease his burning feet, raised himself swiftly and bent

over his work with exaggerated attention. A solemn silence fell upon the half of the loft that the forelady faced. Smugly conscious of her power, the forelady stood still a few moments, then turned to instal order in the other half of the loft. Instantly the mouths of several girls shut automatically, one upon a whispered tale of a "feller" who behind a rack had behaved like a "fresh thing," thus proving that he did not know a "lady of high ability" when he met one; another, upon the earnest information that "rats" could be bought at the five-and-ten-cent store for the latter sum as good as any "what swells pay forty-nine cents for in them department stores." Minnie herself was frightened out of a gaze of awe upon her opposite neighbor, a young woman whose top was decked with a bird's nest of ultra-blond curls and whose cheeks and lips stood out in vivid scarlet on either side of a flour-white nose.

The forelady for a minute or two watched the new "hand" laying crackers in rows, then walked slowly along, taking note of wooden and paper boxes strewn about carelessly. She would see to their removal; also to the washing of the windows, which were badly bespattered, and to the leaking of the big sink. The huge rubber mat underneath was swimming in a pool of water, and the girls who worked near the sink were getting wet feet.

Minnie's eyes followed the departing forelady. A shop with a forelady and a foreman and everything! O God! She lowered her head to hide her distress from her neighbor. And Louis would tell Dora! Even Uncle Leopold might hear of her disgrace. She burned with humiliation. To think that his threat had come true!

Maybe he had cursed her! She hated him—hated Dora—hated being alive. If her mother had had any love for her children, she would never have married again. She cared for herself and “that man” only. She hated her mother. The tears rolled down her cheeks and dropped on to the board.

“Say, sissy, them crackers sell dry,” said Minnie’s co-worker.

Some who heard giggled. Minnie flushed and proceeded to lay crackers with greater speed.

In a far end of the loft a machine was set in motion. It sent forth a few shrill notes as of ecstasy, and came to a halt with an immense groan. The suddenness of it startled Minnie and added to her misery. She felt like screaming, like tearing the young flesh from her body. Envious thoughts ravaged her soul of the girls she had left behind at high school. Why had she been picked out for this—for working in a shop—the meanest fate of all!

Neighbors at adjoining tables began to hum a sentimental tune: *I wonder where you are to-night, my love*. The notes wound themselves around Minnie’s heart like a shroud.

The place buzzed with sounds of activity. The very air seemed to go round and round and round. Beads of perspiration stood out on foreheads, rings deepened under eyes, time seemed endless, minutes to be hours.

Then a shrill shriek exhausting itself automatically put out the life of drudgery. A crank seemed to have been turned off in the mechanism of the people. Men, women, boys and girls dropped a curtain of restraint and rushed pellmell to one side. In a single minute a human sheet

was formed, which, for its denseness, could make no progress forward.

"Got the pip?" a young fellow, cupping his hands at his mouth, hallooed. Girls giggled. Boys moved closer to them.

A bony old woman, gaping at Minnie, elbowed her way up to her. She blinked her watery blue eyes.

"Gotche dinner, sissy?" she asked in a hoarse, coarse voice. Minnie edged away. The woman peered at Minnie's hands for her lunch parcel. "Go on up there," she piped, pointing to a rear door. "Ye kin git pie——" The woman didn't seem real to Minnie, who heard the instruction as in a nightmare. She didn't move. The woman drew still closer, as if to impart a great secret, and laid her bony hand, smeared with a brown, sticky substance, on Minnie's arm. A man eager to pass pushed by them. His shirt was wet with perspiration; his person exuded a sour sweat smell. Minnie gagged with nausea. "Ain't you heard what I been saying?" the old woman whispered in her hoarse voice.

Minnie turned red-rimmed eyes upon her. It was all so utterly strange! *Was* it a shop? *Where* was she? She was filled with terror. The old woman might have been a witch out of a fairy tale, all the others, wild animals in an arena. Mad with a desire to escape, she rushed to the door that the old woman had indicated and out into a dark hallway, where she sank down on the top step of the flight of stone stairs and buried her head in her hands.

"It's a shop—it's a shop—it's *really* a shop!" She swayed back and forth. She was too wretched for tears.

Time passed; another shrill whistle announced the ex-

piration of the lunch hour. With bent head Minnie joined the throng of lighter-hearted ones returning to their tables of toil.

XIII

Two months later Minnie was still in the employ of the Titanic Biscuit Company and still living with the Argushes. She had capitulated. But her capitulation was not the result of resignation or surrender. She was merely too numb to resist. Circumstances had dealt her a stupefying blow. Like an automaton she went daily to the factory and returned to the tenement house of the horrible past.

At first her fellow-workers of the same sex construed her apathy as queerness. When they learned she had been a high-school girl, however, and that this was her first job, they labelled her a "stiff," after which they faithfully ignored her. Never was she invited to join them in their frolics, nor to eat lunch with them on the stone stairs, one of the factory's commodious lunch rooms. As for the men, they never asked her to make "dates," nor even gave her a friendly poke in the ribs.

Minnie was as little alive to her social ostracism as to everything else about her. Indeed, she would have found it far more unnatural had her companionship been sought. The people in the factory passed to and fro, stood beside, behind and before her like phantoms. Her world was not real. She was stunned, benumbed.

She felt secure about Dora and her family for she had elicited from Louis the promise that he would not tell her friend and she avoided meeting Ida and Beckie

again; and nothing else came to prick her out of her torpidity.

That stare into a distant world in the great gray eyes of Minnie attracted Mr. Camely, the foreman. He would watch her with amusement as she worked or sat alone, or arrived alone in the morning or left alone at night. Either, he thought, she was quite different from the others, or she was putting on airs. He would find out.

Once he addressed her as she stood at work. Did she think the row she had made was straight? She flushed as she raised her eyes to his.

"I—I think so."

Mr. Cameley kept her troubled eyes raised a moment longer, then, smiling, gave her a friendly whisk under the chin and turned away. The thing was unheard of! With a great whirr the wheels of gossip were set revolving among the Maggies and the Susies. "That stiff," they determined, was not to be left in the smug consciousness that she was "good enough for the foreman." To ignore her was not enough; she must be squelched with disdain; so they passed her by like haughty queens, drawing in their social skirts and holding high their heads.

Mr. Camely followed up the one attention with others. Occasionally he stopped at Minnie's table to lay a few crackers in a row and asked her if she didn't think he did better work than she—just for a look into her upturned eyes, which somehow undermined his foreman's dignity.

Minnie, who felt she was being singled out for particular inspection of her work, lived in dread of the "sack." The shop now had become the alternative to starving, and so every time Mr. Camely approached she trembled.

"She's so dead stuck on him, she's fidgety," her opposite neighbor communicated to the other girls.

Once when Mr. Camely was in an especially good mood, he called to Minnie as she was passing his office and ordered her, with affected gruffness, to come in. As she stood timidly facing him, he had to drop his smiling eyes; he took boyish pleasure in his power.

"You mustn't eat so many crackers," he said with assumed forbiddingness.

Minnie was dumfounded. She raised astonished eyes in which Mr. Camely revelled.

"Be careful," he teased, "don't go too far."

Out of his presence Minnie found words of self-defense and was miserable that she had not told him he was accusing her wrongly. For days she harbored a wretched sense of injustice and resolved that at the very first opportunity she would explain to Mr. Camely; but when the chance came, she fell into an uncontrollable tremble and said nothing. She remained a thief in the foreman's eyes! How she loathed her palpitating heart, her roof-rooted tongue.

Again, some days later, Mr. Camely summoned Minnie to his office.

"What's that lump in your stocking?" He ordered her to pull down her stocking, pretending that he expected to find nuts or crackers. What he found was her week's wages tied in a handkerchief.

This time Mr. Camely got no amusement from the look in Minnie's eyes. He laughed a chopped laugh, pinched her cheek, called her "pretty," and hurried her out of the room.

The end of the week brought a fifty-cent raise in her wages—with numerous consequences.

For one thing, it set Minnie's heart at rest as to the possibility of being sacked. A very thirsty man will be grateful for muddy water. Then it permitted the extravagance of breakfasts. Three dollars and fifty cents a week, for all the elasticity of the poor man's dollar, simply would not cover all of Minnie's needs. Breakfast had been, resignedly, a permanent elimination. In the third place it redeemed her with the Argushes in spite of her queer ways. After all, a girl who can get a fifty-cent raise at the end of only a few months must be "smart." And, lastly, it gave Louis the tremendous satisfaction of saying "I told you so" to the Argushes. He quite swelled with pride.

XIV

One Saturday midday, at closing hour, Mr. Camely, with the prospect of an empty afternoon and evening before him, sat yawning in his office. He was bored. Minnie, one of the last of the workers to leave the loft, passed by his open door, heard him snap his fingers, and glanced in. He beckoned to her to enter. He settled himself leisurely in his revolving-chair, lolling with parted legs like a man inviting a fascinating wife or mistress to sit on his knee. Minnie stood falteringly in the middle of the room.

"Sit down." Mr. Camely pushed forward a chair.

She sat down gingerly on the edge. A ray of sunshine lighted up her hair and gave it a reddish glint; her gray eyes were soft and melancholy. The man's eyes traveled over her person lustily.

"How'je like to go to a show to-night?" he asked with the same leisureliness in his tone as in his manner.

Minnie stared at him. For the first time she observed that his features were those of an ordinary human being. He had always seemed to belong to a different species.

A show! Mr. Camely, the foreman, was asking her to a show! She could not believe her ears. She had never in her life been to a show. Bells tinkled glad tunes in her head. But the music was short-lived. She looked down upon her faded waist and her sugar-smeared skirt.

"I have no nice dress."

"Go home and change your dress."

"I have no home." Every bit of her awe of the foreman was gone. She could have taken him into her confidence about all her affairs.

"Don't you live somewhere?"

"But not at home——"

Mr. Camely suddenly straightened up. His breath was labored and his eyes wore an odd stare, like the doctor's. Minnie's heart gave a violent leap. She cast a swift look toward the open door into the empty loft.

"Come on—give's a kiss," cried Mr. Camely in a muffled voice, and leaned forward to take the kiss.

Mortal terror struck into the girl's heart. She jumped up, wrenched herself free from Mr. Camely's detaining hold, and, the next instant, was out of his office, running madly down the six flights of stone stairs.

XV

She stood outside the huge factory panting for breath, in a torment of uncertainty. Had she done right to run away? Had she heard right? Had Mr. Camely asked her to let him kiss her? Had he wanted to do the same as the doctor? Were all men going to treat her that

way? Goodness, what could be the matter with them! Maybe she should have let him kiss her, he was the foreman. Now, maybe, she had lost her position. But maybe he had not noticed that she had run away; he might have thought she had just walked out to get a drink.

Some instinct, however, exceeding her reason, told Minnie that she had done right to run away and, furthermore, that she must not return to the shop. Coöperating with her instinct was Louis' warning; yet Louis had confused her by his own conduct. Round and round circled her impulses—to return immediately to the shop, to run home, to go back to the shop the next day, never to go back—while, independently of her will, her footsteps carried her rapidly homeward. She reached the tenement out of breath, pale, worn.

Mrs. Argush was bending over a tin basin in which lay her young slice of heaven splashing in warm water.

"What is it? Why do you look so sick?" the good-hearted woman exclaimed with exaggerated breathlessness. Minnie made no answer and burst out crying when Mrs. Argush repeated the questions. In a flurry of alarm Mrs. Argush raised her infant out of the water in her arms, hastily threw a shawl over him, and led Minnie into the bedroom. "Lie down," she cried, "lie down."

While keeping watch over Minnie, Mrs. Argush dressed her baby and invented a thousand reasons for the girl's crying spell.

Minnie, on the other hand, was tortured by a new thought. Would the Argushes and Louis think she had been truthful about the raise? It was only a little over two weeks since she had got it. Who leaves a position so soon upon a raise? And again came the frightful

uncertainty as to whether she ought or ought not to return to work the next day, and whether she ought to have run away at all.

Once or twice Mrs. Argush broke the silence to beg Minnie to relieve herself by saying what was the matter. The only response she received was a restless turning of the girl's body and a fresh outburst of tears. Finally she went into the other room to put her baby to sleep. "*Schluff mein faigele, mach zu deine aigelech,*" she sang softly in a sweet contralto.

The sound of voices roused Minnie. The bedroom, always dismal, was now pitch-dark. She must have been asleep a long time! She jumped up and hurried to the threshold, and asked what time it was, astonished to see Mr. Argush home. Mr. Argush, washing himself at the sink, looked out from a layer of soap lather and smiled.

"Time for a young lady to be up," he joked, in the hope of cheering her, Mrs. Argush having already told him of the state in which she had come home.

During supper Minnie sat silently brooding. Sleep had not dispelled her unhappiness.

After supper Mr. Argush said he was going to visit the Chernins. Mrs. Argush sent him a wink that meant he was to take Minnie along; the diversion, she felt, would do the girl good. Mr. Argush promptly extended the invitation and received a refusal. There was a bit of talk, and five minutes later Minnie, tearful, was following Mr. Argush out of the house.

On the street he teased her. Had she got another raise? Or was it a falling out with Louis, her sweetheart that was depressing her? What then? Until poor Minnie, overwrought, felt herself grow faint. She stopped and brought her hands to her face. It was not

a trifle that was distressing the girl, Mr. Argush was now convinced, and his paternal heart was much concerned. He slackened his pace and every moment asked how she felt. At last they reached the Chernin home.

Eight men sat playing poker in the kitchen, the room into which the entrance door led. Above and around them hovered a thick cloud of tobacco smoke, which dispersed as if intending to make room for the visitors. Olga Chernin, dark, tall and stately, with a smile that bade all the world welcome, rose to greet her guests. An inquiring look from Olga reminded Mr. Argush that he had forgotten to introduce Minnie.

"Oh, this is Miss Mendel, our boarderke." Mr. and Mrs. Chernin shook hands with her. The eight card players rose from their chairs and saluted with exaggerated chivalry. A burst of laughter and a shuffling of chairs filled the small room with jolly noise. The tea-kettle spat out of its snout upon the red-hot stove.

Minnie was bewildered. She turned deathly pale. A sudden dizziness overtook her. Mr. Argush turned quickly to support her. "Take her to lie down!" he cried to Olga, who caught her round the waist and led her through the railroad flat.

For all the ricketiness of the bed and the dinginess of the room, it was a comfort to Minnie, who ached in every limb and was soul weary.

Olga, seating herself on the edge of the bed, stroked her hair and meditated. Poor child, so young and a boarderke already! Goodness knew how such things came to be in this most glorious of all countries! The Argushes had only two rooms. The child probably slept in the kitchen. Where did she work? Where were her parents?

"I can stay alone," Minnie said.

"Oh, no, that's all right, I'll stay here." Olga spoke cordially, and she stooped and kissed the newcomer on her forehead.

A warm, peaceful feeling stirred in Minnie's breast, a tenderness for Olga, the stranger of a few minutes ago. She laid her hand in hers.

From the kitchen, where Mr. Argush was now seated with the others participating in the game of cards, came his voice leading in a melancholy Russian melody. He began softly, like a lover not uncertain of his welcome come awooing; then, finding himself repulsed, using persuasion. The song rose to notes of passionate disappointment, was modulated again as with pleading, and died out as in despair.

Olga felt tears drop on her hand. She leaned forward.

"What is it, dear?" she asked tenderly. Minnie wept the more.

Another soft melody.

Minnie's soul merged with Olga's. Naïvely and passionately emphasizing her distress because the Argushes and Louis might suspect her of having lied as to the raise, Minnie told Olga her story.

Good Olga's heart warmed with fond motherliness toward this child. "You did perfectly right to run away," she soothed her, "and you must certainly not go back."

Minnie's child heart was somewhat relieved. But the greatest worry was still with her: the untruthfulness of which she might be suspected.

"I tell you what," said Olga, hitting upon a happy idea, "come here every morning with a paper and start out from here to look for work! You will soon find it with-

out doubt. All your spare time spend here. No one needs to know you are without work at all. And when you get another place, who will know whether it's the Titanic Biscuit Company or The Schmitanic Trisket Company you are working in?" She spoke enthusiastically, entering wholeheartedly into the little girl's perturbed state of heart.

Olga had lifted the universe from the acquiescent Minnie's shoulders.

XVI

Olga and Boris Chernin, with their son Gregory, had had to flee from Russia to escape exile to Siberia on account of radical propaganda. Boris and Olga's aristocratic training in Russia had made no provision for the earning of a livelihood. In democratic America, Boris found himself compelled to choose between working or starving. He took any job that offered itself, one winter even shoveling snow. That winter he was taken ill with pneumonia, for a time hanging between life and death and emerging a candidate for tuberculosis. What with poor care because of lack of means, he soon succumbed to the disease; after which Olga peddled small articles, did day's work, and served as midwife, all to keep her husband in a boarding-house at Liberty, her son Gregory at school, and herself alive. Boris got better, and Gregory entered college with honors. Several times Boris tried his hand again at work of different sorts, but his health, each time, threatened to give way, and Olga insisted upon remaining the sole dependable breadwinner and allowed him only to do odd jobs now and then when he felt especially well. Leisure hung too heavily on

the man's hands. Friends dropped in evenings, and sometimes during the day as well, to play cards for the pure comradeship of it. The habit grew, as did also the number of men that came, until Olga, exhausted, beaten by the daily struggle, to which she never could become accustomed, evolved the plan of charging the men a fee for the privilege. Soon she herself took part in the games. She had luck, and so did Boris. The innocent playhouse became a professional gambling den, though always preserving a certain air of decency, upon which Olga insisted on Gregory's account. If, she would think in bitter apprehension, he were to recall his home in later years as a foul place, his mother and father as unclean people! Yet often she told herself that if he were the son of his parents in the soul as well as in the body, he would develop sufficient sympathy to realize that a man treated like a dog cannot be hung for failing to behave like a man. Gregory would surely remember the days when he and she had huddled together in the cold and shared a miserable cot.

* * * * * *

Minnie, with a newspaper under her arm, arrived at the Chernin home early the next morning. It was a rainy day and so dark still that the family was only just stirring; yet she was greeted with the warmest cordiality.

"This is my son, Gregory," Olga called to Minnie.

A young chap in shirt sleeves, with large, soft, brown eyes like his mother's, a generous mouth, rather high cheek bones, and a shock of curly brown hair, smiled at her. Minnie spontaneously smiled back.

"Gregory, dear," Olga said in her high-pitched, caressing voice, as she pointed to a chair at the window, "take your coat off the chair and let Minnie sit down."

Gregory cleared the chair and Minnie sat down. "Spread your newspaper on the table, dear," said Olga.

When Minnie was comfortably seated Olga turned to tidy the room. Gregory, glancing at Minnie, caught a frightened look in her eyes, as if she felt out of place. He looked away. He felt sorry for her. Minnie became absorbed in the "Help Wanted—Female" columns. When next she looked up, the room was tidied, the three were dressed, Gregory in a becoming dark blue suit, and Olga was saying: "The coffee is ready." She insisted that Minnie join them. Minnie protested with intense earnestness, wholly unconscious that out of a corner of his eye Gregory was watching her two gray ones as they did their imploring to be let off. Her eyes had that quality of innocent mesmerism which draws men against their will. It was her very unconsciousness of their charm that made her the more fascinating.

It was the between-season when Christmas activity has not yet begun and advertisements for help are few. Olga urged Minnie not to worry. As it was raining hard, it was just as well for her to stay indoors that day, she said.

Toward the middle of the morning men began to straggle in. Olga, answering a question she thought must be in Minnie's mind, lightly explained their presence. The one effect of the explanation upon the child, who had no idea of the interrelation of card-playing and indecency, was to leave her puzzled as to why it had been given. Only the sophisticated are suspicious. Minnie had met men in this home the night before; it was quite natural to meet men here again.

Olga saw that Minnie looked tired and concluding at the same time that it would be more comfortable for

everyone if she were in another room, took her to the bedroom. "It will do you good to lie down," she said. "Try even to sleep." Kissing her gently, she left her alone.

An hour later Minnie was awakened by a shout, followed by a thunderous laugh. Above all the voices Olga's coursed through the air like a peal of music.

"Full house!"

The girl jumped up and ran to the kitchen. She was dressed in a bright, orange-colored mull blouse with a black tie and a black skirt, which, for all its cheapness, was immensely becoming. Her hair was dishevelled, her cheeks were flushed from sleep, her eyes shone like two stars. She stood in the doorway, hands clutched below her breast, head and shoulders slightly forward, lips parted, and brows slightly lifted. First some, then all, of the men raised their eyes and were silenced by the girlish vision.

"Well, dear, did you have a nice sleep?" Olga called pleasantly, smiling.

The spell was broken. Minnie relaxed and entered farther into the room, falling into her natural timidity.

"Yes," she said, glancing shyly from one man to another.

One of the gamblers, large of body and tight of muscle, with small, insinuating eyes and mountainous cheekbones, gazed at Minnie hard, an impertinent smile playing round his lips. She had to drop her eyes.

Olga rose to fill the tea glasses and gave her chair to Minnie, who took it diffidently.

"Give her some tea, too," Boris called to Olga.

"Of course," Olga rejoined in a tone implying there was no need to make this suggestion. No Russian has

to be reminded that tea and hospitality go hand in hand.

When the glasses were filled, Olga brought herself a chair from the bedroom. The gamblers, moving closer to the table, resumed their play. Heads were bent lower. The ugly expression of hunters in pursuit of prey fell like a veil over each face. Now and then one stopped to take a sip of strong tea, perhaps to throw a look at the young female stranger, whose eyes followed their activity with an interest that grew more intense with each new shout of enthusiasm, with each explosion of coarse laughter.

The man with the mountainous cheekbones, Joe by name, raised his eyes oftener than the others to feast upon the new female. He speculated as to the reasons for her presence, and since his experience was by no means limited to this one gambling house his conjectures ran riot. She looked young and as if she had never witnessed gambling before, yet, he decided, she must be sixteen at least and maybe was shamming innocence. Womenfolk were artists at shamming. He would find out. Several times he cleared his throat and glanced at Minnie as if he meant to say something. Finally he came out with it, ostensibly addressing the gathering in general.

"Well, why can't the young lady join in the game?" He glanced covertly at her.

There followed an exchange of looks, during which activity was suspended. Olga refrained from saying something that seemed to be on the tip of her tongue. She contemplated the girl, shrugged her shoulders, and again fastened her attention on the cards.

Minnie looked shyly from one to another. She rested her eyes longest, and gratefully, upon Joe, who was

thereby imbued with greater courage. Pulling himself together, he rose, moved his chair nearer to his neighbor's, told the others to do the same, and invited Minnie to "move close and be a sport." She hesitated, with a diffident glance at Olga. Olga, just then reminded by her husband that the glasses needed replenishing again, rose; she smiled only half consent upon Minnie, and Minnie remained where she was, seated outside the circle.

"Nu, tell the baby she can play!" called Joe to Olga.

Giving her shoulders a nonchalant shrug, Olga said to Minnie:

"If you want to. It won't hurt you, I suppose. Try. It is fun."

It was a moment of exultation for Minnie, who took her place eagerly, quivering with joyful anticipation.

Joe snatched Olga's chair, which was next to Minnie's, and gaily ordered Olga to take his. His interest so flattered Minnie that she at once conceived a liking for this big man. When he insisted that Olga make her tea as strong as everybody else's, saying Olga did not give the girl credit for being the "sport" that she was, her gratitude knew no bounds. For the first time in her life she saw some importance in being Minnie. Her eyes, shining with the new light, were extraordinarily beautiful; and Joe lent himself readily to their charm. Bent, moreover, upon testing her, he edged closer and proceeded to give instructions. She felt his warm breath graze her cheek; his shoulder touched hers, his leg leaned against hers. His manner was vigorous, inspiring, his voice deep, his tone compelling. He was irresistible, masterful. Minnie felt agitated—stormed.

Thus and so was meant by the stakes, the blind, the

straddle, the ante. The game had seemed so simple when she had watched the men playing! Now it appeared a fearful complication. Her face fell into troubled lines; and when some of the players grew impatient her heart pounded unmercifully. Joe swiftly hushed the complainants. If they didn't like it they could get out, he thundered. Joe was a masterful man; they submitted. Turning again to Minnie, he said: "It sounds worse than it is," and went on teaching her about pairs, straights, flush, full house, fours, straight flush, royal flush. Here some laughed and made comment: "It's ken heppen maybe perhaps possible efsher!"

A sample game to be played. There was grumbling, but the game was played. Minnie leaned eagerly toward Joe for this and that bit of information. She followed his instructions with a zest that delighted him.

At last came a real game! Joe was financial backer.

Her chest rose and fell feverishly. She quivered from head to toe. Her hair became moist round her forehead and fell low in becoming ringlets. Her heightened color enhanced the false brilliance of her eyes. She reminded one of a young, spirited horse galloping. Not even Joe's leg, which persistently rested against hers, though she unconsciously kept moving her own leg away, actually roused her from the trance. Six times, without her being conscious of it, Olga had refilled her glass with strong tea.

After a number of rounds she quite quietly ran up the betting. When "called," she said as quietly: "Straight flush."

A moment of tense incredulity. Minnie laid her cards down. A craning of necks. A roar that ended in a veritable panic. The gamers shrieked, laughed, pushed,

punched one another all at the same time. The thick cloud of smoke above their heads moved as if in search of safer quarters.

Minnie, at first dazed, soon tingled with delirious excitement; and when a pile of money was shoved her way she was almost overcome. She thrilled and quivered under the spell of the new birth of her personality.

No wonder that after this Minnie quite abandoned the thought of job-hunting. In this heaven of thrill and excitement, she even made money—more money than she had made working for the Titanic Biscuit Company. She hated the day to end. She regretted having to go to bed. In the mornings she hurried off eagerly from the Argush home. For weeks never a thought of other things entered her mind. She developed a light-heartedness, a vivacity, a new brilliance that slipped from her tongue and darted from her eyes.

Louis took the greatest delight in the successful Argush care of their “boarderke” and boasted:

“Not for nothing did I tell you she is a mighty smart girl.” The Argushes themselves, little suspecting the games and the dozen glasses of tea working in Minnie’s veins, were delighted with their own effective hospitality.

XVII

Joe’s seat remained permanently beside Minnie’s. He would have it so.

Olga, though a wise woman on the whole, was blind to this that was going on under her very nose. Beneath her roof, gambling, elsewhere an obnoxious vice, became nothing more nocuous than a “little game or two of poker.” Elsewhere the sight of a young Minnie with

eyes glittering more lustfully every day, would have incensed her. But in her own home what harm? Better that than a Titanic Biscuit Company with foremen and what not. Likewise, the foreman was a rogue, while Joe, one of her guests, was not, though his entire personality proclaimed his rascality and his small eyes fed like leeches on Minnie's youth. She would even tease Minnie laughingly. "Some day a man will run away with your two gray eyes," she would say. Joe she would tease about being in love with the girl and warn him he had a rival in her own son Gregory.

One day something occurred to open Olga's eyes.

Gregory disapproved of his parents' business, though his disapproval at first, as he was too young at the time to appreciate its sordidness, came from his hatred of the constant hilarity, the thick smoke, the atmosphere of freemasonry. His was a quiet, brooding, refined nature. When he complained, his mother took pains to explain carefully that his father was too sick to work, while she herself could stand a rough struggle no longer and was eager also to give him the advantages of a good education. She convinced him she had no other choice and so won his tolerance. It was now about a year since he had entered any complaint.

In that one year Gregory had matured. He had come into contact at college with other eighteen-year-old youths, Russian Jews, who took immense delight in long discussions of sociological problems and were far wiser than he about life and its mud puddles. Gambling, in their opinion, was so unquestionably an evil that their few curt, uncompromising words, when it was mentioned once, left Gregory with a painful smart. He never invited his college mates to his home. . . . In most of their

discussions he took an equal part, but became a silent listener when they launched in their free, advanced way upon the subject of sex. In this, too, they seemed so much wiser than he. One young reactionary knew Schopenhauer's essay on woman by heart. A champion of the sex fought him with Mill on *The Subjection of Woman*; a "radical" came to the support of the champion with Bebel's *Die Frau*, while a modern young cynic said "take a whip along" when you call on a woman; which also provoked endless arguments, favorable and unfavorable, concerning the qualities of the sex. In consequence Gregory came to realize that women were "different." Heretofore he had not been conscious of them as a separate kind of being and his opposite. He began to study the one of the species that fell under his direct experience.

She *was* different. She was something as different from the boys he knew as a light and airy thing was different from the kitchen table of his home. She was awe-inspiring. She made him want to keep aloof. It seemed to him he could never bring himself to speak to her, for her answers, he felt vaguely, would probably be different in the same way as she herself; would puzzle him, embarrass him.

Minnie, for her part, was attracted to Gregory, even though his presence, to which she was always keenly alive, and his steady brown eyes fastened upon her had a disconcerting effect upon her at card-playing times.

One Saturday morning when she reached the Chernin tenement she hesitated to go up to the home out of the sensitive consideration that it was their day of rest (because of their customers' piety), when they indulged in

late rising, and she would be intruding. She seated herself on the stairway to waste an hour.

For the first time in the weeks of her gaming, her mind, as she crouched in the gloom of the hall, reverted to her home. She pictured the members of her family, who would just then be rising and dressing. (Sarah had retained the custom of Sabbath rest.) She visualized Beckie partly dressed, rosy and pretty, languidly and aimlessly hunting in out-of-the-way corners for her clothes, which she always misplaced. She heard the others laughing at and teasing her for her forgetfulness. She heard her mother calling each in turn to breakfast. She saw them all at table, talking, laughing. She felt lonely, melancholy.

"What are you doing here?" a man's voice cried. It was Gregory coming down the stairs, thrown off his usual reserve by the unexpected encounter.

"I'm sitting—I'm sitting—I hated to go in—you—you—get up late Saturdays—I'm always intruding——"

He liked the softness of her voice; he was drawn to her. He had a fleeting desire to tell her to stop gambling, and to ask her why she didn't live at home and go to school.

A book dropped from his hand. They bent simultaneously to pick it up; their heads collided. They straightened up and laughed. Minnie's laugh had the same gay ring as when things went well at the card table. Gregory stood a moment smiling down on her, then stooped to pick up the book. "They are up and they are waiting for you," he said. Touching the brim of his hat, he said good-by and left.

Minnie looked after him until he was out of sight. It was with an excited flutter of her heart, which the simple

encounter did not warrant, that she made her way upstairs. Several times she had to stop for breath. The weeks of unwholesome living were telling on her.

She arrived at an opportune moment. The Chernins had forgotten to tell Gregory that they were going to an uncle for lunch and he was to join them there. Minnie could tell him. In a few minutes they left, Olga urging Minnie to make herself at home and eat something, as she looked so pale and must have come away without breakfast.

Being alone was a novel sensation, a pleasant sensation—and yet one was somehow reminded of the tiredness which one forgot in the bustle. Minnie rubbed her eyes, stretched, yawned, and went to lie down on Gregory's cot in the dark, air-tight room adjoining the kitchen. How luxurious it felt to stretch full length—to be without fear that someone would intrude! It was quiet—quiet! Oh, how good it felt! She placed her arms in a circle above her head. Thoughts of the games, Joe's ever-ready helpfulness, his enthusiasm and pride over her gains warmed her being like a cordial. Joe was a great deal like Louis, she thought; yet they were different. Joe was always awfully sure of himself; Louis was awkward and embarrassed. There were other differences, too. After all they were not so much alike. Perhaps it was simply that they were both big. My, how loudly Joe talked! Her mother would have referred to him as a "suldat." Louis was always very nice now when they took walks together. He never acted again as he had on that rainy day. She hardly ever remembered it any more. Now she thought of it, it struck her that ever since then Louis had seemed less easy with her. "That's because he knows he wasn't true," she decided. . . . She wondered

when Gregory would return. It somehow gave her pleasure to think of him to-day. He was so nice—his brown eyes and all. And he had laughed so heartily after the collision of their heads! Had that been one of his college books? Could he be going to the same college as Abie Ratkin—as—as—Jacob! She sat up, frightened. Goodness! What if he did know Jacob and should tell him where she was!

The bell rang. She jumped up and ran with pounding heart to the door. It was Gregory. Olga's message fairly burst from her. Her eagerness and earnestness were so out of proportion, that Gregory was moved to laugh. What could she do but laugh, too? They laughed and laughed. Finally he whipped off his cap and said he would make tea: it was cold out and he was chilled. Would Minnie drink, too? Maybe. She was really weak with hunger. The night before she had had no appetite for supper. It was nearly twenty-four hours since she had eaten anything. After the laugh her legs trembled; and how her heart pounded! She went quickly to sit down. Picking up one of Gregory's library books from the table, she cried:

"Oh, algebra!"

Gregory, astonished, turned from the stove.

"Do you know algebra?"

"Oh, yes. I passed with high marks."

He was more greatly astonished.

"Did you go to college?"

"No. High School, Wadleigh High School."

"What year?"

"Twod——"

It was a slip of the tongue. They laughed.

"Second," she finally wedged in between giggles.

"What languages did you have?"

"German and Latin."

"Why don't you go to high school now?"

She dropped her eyes. Her face clouded over. But she felt at ease now with Gregory, and answered frankly:

"Because I have a stepfather and I went away from home."

Gregory proceeded with the tea preparations more thoughtfully.

Minnie found herself wishing he would hurry. A feeling of faintness was coming upon her. To hide what she knew must be the traitorous pallor of her face, she walked over to the window and stood looking out. In a moment Gregory heard a thud. He dropped the lid of the teakettle, turned and saw Minnie on the floor. He rushed over to her, shook her, called her by name. She made no answer. He lifted her and carried her to his cot. Running back for a glass of water, he dashed it in her face. She came to.

"Yes," she said in reply to his question, "I have fainted before."

Following her instructions, he quickly brought a wet towel, bound it about her head, and laid coverings over her, for she was having a chill. When she felt better he made her drink tea with whisky in it.

"Are you *sure* you feel better?" Gregory was not so willing to take her word for it, as the rings under her eyes were very dark. "I'll bet you had no breakfast!" he ventured.

Minnie made no answer.

"I'll boil you some eggs."

"Oh, no, don't. I don't feel like eating," she said, sit-

ting up. But she grew terribly dizzy. Bringing her hands up to her eyes, she groaned.

"What's the matter?" cried Gregory, forcing her down on the cot again.

"Don't!" pleaded Minnie.

At that moment they were both startled by a voice.

"Nu! Nu!"

It was Joe, who had come for his umbrella, many times forgotten. Drawing his own conclusion about the proximity of the two young people, he laughed a coarse laugh.

"Oh, you kids!"

"How did you get in?" asked Gregory.

"I left the patent lock open," Minnie explained.

"She fainted," said Gregory. "Mama and papa are away." And he went on to say that they were expecting him for lunch and he was in quite a dilemma about meeting them.

Joe eyed the boy closely. His first conjecture faded a bit. Gregory seemed to be telling the truth. Yet if he himself, Joe decided rapidly, were caught in so compromising a position he would have found a blanket of sham far thicker than Gregory's—yes, even at Gregory's age. "I'll tell him to go to his parents"—thought he; "I'll offer to mind her myself." And so he did.

Did Minnie think she was all right? asked Gregory. Was she sure it was all right for him to go? Yes, indeed. He went.

The moment the door shut, Joe swung into the bedroom and sat down on the cot, a voluptuous smile playing upon his face and in his tiny, insinuating eyes. "Well," he said, "are we going to be a good girl?" He smoothed her face, her hair, her neck in a single stroke. She was not afraid, but she moved her head away.

"Come on, come on," he cried brazenly, "sweet sixteen and never been kissed?" She blinked her eyes. "Never been kissed?" he insisted. His vigor, his vulgarity, made her feel dizzy; she gulped for breath. Nothing has the power so to intimidate finer natures as vulgarity.

"Yes," she felt compelled to reply.

He ha-ha'd; the place rang with his ha-ha! How it pleases a man to discover he is right!

"There!" he cried, as he bent his bulky upper half forward and lifted her like a feather in his arms. He planked down a kiss on her lips which brought their teeth into contact.

Before Minnie could think beyond her tremendous surprise, she heard a woman's scream.

"God mine!"

With a jerk Joe released her.

It was Olga. She and Boris, not finding the uncle at home, had returned. They had met Gregory at the foot of the stairs.

There was a silent measuring of souls with eyes.

"You dirty, rotten bum, if you know what's good for you, get out of this house and don't you ever cross this threshold again!" Olga pointed to the door.

Joe insolently sauntered past her for his hat and umbrella, and in the same insolent manner made for the door. There, with hat in hand, he stood for a second holding the knob, threw an insinuating smile at Gregory, which he transferred to the mother and next to Minnie, who had risen from the cot and was standing in the doorway between the rooms.

"Ha-ha!" he roared, "the son is younger——"

Olga caught the insinuation in a flash. Had she laid undue confidence in the girl? Joe had taken her heart,

pierced it, and thrown it back in her face. She wanted to kill him.

"Get out of here!" she shouted.

He left after another ha-ha.

Minnie, panic-stricken, stood transfixed. Things had happened so quickly that she was dazed into unconsciousness of their reality. She seemed to be dreaming a nightmare. Olga darted a look at her that made her cower as before an instrument of death. Then the tension broke. Minnie fainted again.

The same thing had happened before, Gregory said, and told the full story of how he had come to leave Minnie in Joe's care. Olga's mother heart clung to the explanation with fierce relief. *That* was what it had been. Joe, in his vile mind, had distorted her boy's innocent ministrations.

Olga, bending over Minnie and trying to revive her, suddenly realized that the girl must no longer be left ignorant of the facts of life. She must be told everything as her mother would have told her had she deserved the name of mother. And she must no longer be allowed to come to the house to gamble. How was it, Olga blamed herself, she had never realized the enormous danger of it before! She must have been blind, an idiot!

XVIII

Minnie rested on Gregory's cot until the late afternoon; then Olga, considering the time opportune, as the menfolk were away, called to her to come to the kitchen.

"Sit down here." Olga indicated a chair beside her.

What had Olga to say? Minnie felt impending doom. Was it to scold her because "that Joe" had kissed her!

All day as she had lain struggling for the physical strength to rise and go home, the thought of his conduct had tortured her. She had felt again, now with disgust, his rough face against hers; the recollection of his kiss sickened her somewhere way down in the pit of her stomach. Mrs. Chernin—did she think it was *her* fault, that she was to blame?

"Minnie," Olga began gravely—Minnie grew limp with fright—"I have something to tell you. I will speak to you like a mother."

The child stared at her.

"My dear, you are a child yet and—how old are you?"

"Going on sixteen."

"Sixteen!" Olga looked away, tears in her eyes. She sat silent a while, thinking commiseratingly of the poor little girl's lot and wondering how she ought to begin her warning. It was so hard. Bracing herself with the thought that it was inevitable, she moved forward and began.

"You remember what happened to you in the Titanic Biscuit Company—the foreman, I mean?" Minnie remembered. "Well, for Joe to kiss you is just as bad—it's *wrong*—in fact——"

"Uh, I *know* it," cried Minnie, so glad to be able to agree with Olga. She nodded her head vehemently.

Goodness, what *did* this girl understand—what didn't she understand! Olga was wholly puzzled. She sighed and scrutinized Minnie. No, she didn't understand—really—and she wasn't feigning innocence. She was a baby. She had to be told everything. Her instinctive understanding had to be re-enforced by definite knowledge. The attractiveness of her personality to men was only enhanced by her innocence. Some day she would

fall a prey to some beast. Olga was in a flutter. How to say it! Just what to say! If only someone had talked to Olga herself when she had been a young girl, maybe she would know better how to proceed.

"You know, dearie, you are a girl. The others are men. Men and girls marry."

"Yes——"

Olga lapsed again into silence. What in the world was she to say! She looked despairingly at the clock. Gregory or Boris might return at any moment.

"It is only when a man and a woman are married that the man has the right to hold her in his arms, to kiss her. You were right when you ran away from your foreman."

Minnie thought of the doctor and of Louis.

"Did anybody else treat you like that?" There was still a small, lingering doubt in Olga's heart as to what might have transpired between Minnie and Gregory.

"Yes. A doctor and another man."

"What did they do? Who is the other man?"

"The other man is Louis; he is a painter."

Olga smiled at the addendum.

"What did they do?"

Minnie reflected, feeling some hesitancy in telling. "Kissed me and held me tight, especially the doctor. He and I were lying on a lounge."

Again Olga was puzzled. What exactly *had* the girl experienced?

"Did Gregory kiss you, too?"

"Uh, no!" Minnie cried, shocked.

Olga was at last satisfied and felt very tenderly toward Minnie.

"Do you understand now what I mean?" Her voice

carried so much helplessness, she might have been pleading for a favor.

"What?" Minnie asked naively.

"Well, that you must never allow any man or boy to fondle you, kiss you, except if you are married to him or are going to marry him."

Minnie sat silent. She knew it, yes, she knew it. But *what*—how could she help it if *they* did it to *her*?

"I never *ask* them to."

"Of course you don't; but don't *let* them."

"I ran away from them."

Oh, there wasn't any use trying to explain. After all, Minnie would have to grow older. She would learn. It would develop like a plant in her. For the present she had the instinct of self-preservation.

Olga, certain she could be no more explicit, was about to drop the subject when, out of sheer curiosity, she asked:

"Do you *mind* when they do it to you?"

Minnie took a moment to think. The doctor and Louis had frightened her and so had the foreman, but not Joe. She liked Joe. Disgust of his embrace had come only in retrospect.

Olga sat reflecting upon the oddness of it—Joe, a coarse fellow, vile, sordid, was a man Minnie liked! She switched off to another subject, equally as much on her heart.

"And then, Minnie," she began, "gambling is not very nice for a young girl. When I first allowed you to play, I had no idea that you would keep it up indefinitely. You remember I let you come here so that you could have a place from where to look for another position."

Minnie was astonished at the abrupt change of sub-

ject. All her sensitiveness was pricked into attention. She instantly decided Olga was reproaching her. Olga saw that she had turned pale and hesitated to continue.

"It is nearing Christmas time, the busy season," she resumed after a time, putting even greater severity into her tone, "you ought to be able to get work now—in a store perhaps. You ought not to be content to spend every day gambling here with a lot of men." Bad enough, Olga was thinking sorrowfully that *she* had to spend her days so. For a sweet, innocent child, with every opportunity in life, to choose gambling!

How could Minnie discern the tenderness behind Olga's advice? Child that she was, she saw only that Olga was closing her home to her, was accusing her of having outstayed her welcome. And before her lay work in a shop again! The horror that she had been convinced was past and done with faced her again. Her soul quaked. She wanted to cling to Olga, to beg her to let her stay. But a stronger instinct, her pride, held her back.

"You will be much better off, dear," Olga continued. "You will work in a store and make regular wages and get yourself nice dresses, and some day you will marry. *This is no way——*" The "dear" touched Minnie. She began to cry. Olga, meaning to comfort her, unfortunately chose the wrong thing to say. "I let you come a long time. I don't think you have anything to cry about. Another girl would have thought of going away of her own accord, sooner——"

Minnie screamed.

Olga, alarmed, touched her on the arm and told her to control herself. Minnie wrenched herself free. Why had Olga fooled her—made her think she was welcome?

Olga, almost as much as Joe, had always laughed appreciatively when she, Minnie, had had good luck, and had always encouraged her in the spirited part she took in the games. She had not been true, she had not been true! She resented Olga with all her heart.

How should Minnie have guessed that Olga also was naïve? But for Joe's flagrant manifestation of rascality, Olga might have remained blind to the risk she was taking with the fate of the child in her care.

"Take your hands away from your face," Olga said. Her voice sounded even greater severity. Indignantly Minnie jumped from her seat and rushed out of the house.

In the ground-floor hall she encountered Gregory.

"What are you crying about?" He was full of concern.

She edged away. He followed her.

"What are you crying about?"

She pushed past him and ran out.

XIX

The Argushes, who had been anxious when Minnie did not return at her usual Saturday hour, welcomed her with a cordiality that reflected their relief. But her red-rimmed eyes and downcast air alarmed them all over again.

"God mine!" cried Mrs. Argush, "what happened to you? Did you meet with an accident?"

Minnie brushed past her into the bedroom and, without waiting for permission, threw herself on the bed, where she cried and cried. The perplexed couple could

extract no explanation from her nor coax her into partaking of the evening meal.

At eight o'clock Louis happened in. The wildest surmises leapt to his mind. He was dreadfully distressed. Like the Argushes, he coaxed and coaxed her to take him into her confidence, but with as little success. Finally, by the greatest gentleness, he persuaded her to go out with him for a walk.

"You must tell me what happened to you," he said, after they had walked a block in silence. No, she wouldn't, she wouldn't, she wouldn't. But, despite her protestations, some inner voice told Minnie that eventually she would.

"What have you to hide?" Louis shrewdly asked. His face reddened. Minnie's silence in response even to this was particularly ominous. His breath came short and fast. Minnie, frightened by his emotion, brought her thumb to her mouth and looked at him from down up. "You must tell me. I am *bound* to know. Tell me," he commanded, taking hold of her arm.

Though tears of resentment at this importunateness came to her eyes, though her voice choked over the lump in her throat, she told Louis everything that had happened to her, beginning with the foreman of the Titanic Biscuit Company and ending with Olga's advice. The last she repeated in a manner which plainly conveyed that, though Louis himself had confused her, at last she knew.

Louis smiled. He smiled in spite of his pity for her, in spite of his perplexity as to what it was about this girl that rendered her a prey to his species. She was not beautiful, though there was an attractive something about her personality; nor—and his eyes glanced over

her slight frame—was she even well developed. His understanding shrugged its shoulders, while his heart clenched its teeth with jealousy at the thought that another man might possess her.

Louis' sudden passion in the Dakowsky kitchen had deepened into something greater. He had come on frequent visits to the Argushes, had taken many walks with Minnie, had entered into her mental attitude upon things which, immature as it was, carried a delicacy and a sense of justice which to him, especially because he was boorish, had a fascination. She wouldn't go back home because her uncle wasn't fair; she wouldn't have her mother know of her hardships because a mother ought naturally to be concerned; if she had to be reminded that she was a mother, it showed a lack which made her an undeserving mother, and so it was perfectly fair that she, Minnie, deprive her of her oldest daughter. She did not want Dora to know that she had made the compromise of going to work in a shop, because Dora, not having experienced the struggle herself, would call it weakness. As a matter of fact, Minnie herself considered it was weakness. She ought rather to have killed herself. . . . She didn't think a man with intelligence and ambition ought to be a painter. Sharing a front room on the East Side was an affront to a right standard of living; refinement demanded more. She considered having to live with the Argushes an imposition on her by God.

Then there had come the period of stimulation from card playing, when she blossomed into a charming vivacity like a flower in season. She romped with the Argush baby, her eyes full of mischief; she talked to it in a vocabulary beyond the others' comprehension, and laughed gaily over her own sport. The evenings when

Louis visited she seemed especially full of fun ; she would make one mischievous remark after another, charming and delighting Louis.

He had, in fact, for weeks been thinking of marriage to Minnie, though his mind was not yet at peace about it. In his own estimation he was a mere "paintner;" an American high-school girl could aspire to a nobler alliance, he felt.

Yet he was sure he would treat her better than any other man ; he would carry her about in his arms to save her footsteps, he often said to himself ; he would care for her better than for himself. Now she was struggling, and with her determination not to return home, what other relief was there if not marriage? True, she was very young to think of marriage, but she was wise enough. No one was ever so childish in matters of sex as she, and so wise in other matters.

Walking beside him, depressed, her youth so severe a condemnation of the hard fate pursuing her, his heart went out to her in boundless tenderness. Almost as a surprise to himself, he said :

"Minnie, let us get married. I'll take the best care of you. I know you're a high-school girl and I'm only a paintner, but I have money from home and I'll give up work and study to be a doctor—anything you like best——" He paused, flushing all over his large face.

Somehow Minnie was not surprised. Not that she was in the least prepared for the proposal ; it simply had no meaning to her.

He continued to plead his cause by telling her that it would be a solution to her struggles ; he would carry her about in his arms, she would be precious as gold to him. And as he spoke, sunshine flooded her horizon. She

began to draw pictures of a kingdom of four rooms furnished in green plush in which she reigned; and she experienced a sense of peace and comfort. Her silence encouraged Louis who finally asked: "What have you to lose? I will care for you as no one in the world would. And if you wish it, if you think it nicer, I will go with you to see your mother. . . ."

"No, indeed!"

"Then *you* answer!"

All over again he painted in rosy colors all the pleasures of a home; of being forever through with shops and foremen; of doing a little housework, a little cooking, a little marketing, and then being free as a queen.

At each picture Minnie felt closer to the kingdom of heaven.

"When?" she asked.

He could hardly believe his ears.

"Any time—right away," he replied with great vivacity. He felt more excited than he thought he ever could.

"All right," she said simply.

How Louis "the paintner" trembled with joy!

Though it was midnight when they returned, he brought the Argushes out of bed to tell his news. Their gladness took such boisterous forms of expression that neighbors were alarmed. Some suspected thieves, others fire, but the sound of laughter allayed their fears. Mrs. Argush rummaged in the closet for a chipped saucer; finding it, she threw it to the floor and smashed it, shouting "*maseltov! maseltov!*" upon which her spouse commented that she "was going crazy with joy." From a secret region under the sink he brought out a bottle of whisky and passed drinks to the "long life and happiness" of the new couple! The little man beamed and

dimpled, laughed and slapped Louis on the back. Mrs. Argush, on the other hand, assured Louis that she felt about Minnie as her own daughter, and her pride and satisfaction in having found such a grand match for her was boundless. She kissed Minnie and danced her around the room; she embraced and kissed Louis, saying she was living over again the joy of her own engagement. Upon which her husband took her in his arms; petted her and called her "my old one." Mrs. Argush's eyes filled with tears.

Boorish Louis, full of happy emotions, red and uncomfortable, with no place for his hands and feet, sat with a silly smile on his face while a thousand thoughts ran riot in his head. He thanked them. He wanted to beg Mrs. Argush to instruct Minnie in the ways of married life, but he held himself back. He wanted to kiss Minnie, but he held himself back. Indeed, he was so confused that Mr. Argush took pity on him. "Nu, *chusen*," he said, "the bride is tired. You will be together long enough. Let her go to sleep now."

Minnie lived through the whirlwind in a daze. It all seemed remote, the hilarity absurd, and Louis' having told the Argushes absurd. She was mute, annoyed, puzzled and a stranger. When Louis rose to go she was infinitely relieved.

Louis was at the door saying good-night.

Minnie was seated.

"Nu, *kalle*—see what a child she is! Aren't you going to see your lover out?" Mrs. Argush cried.

Minnie rose, surprised that this was expected of her and annoyed with Mrs. Argush. She walked over to Louis. He stood holding the door-knob, blushing and embarrassed; a helpless look in his eyes, the meaning of

which was telegraphed to Mrs. Argush, brought the reply:

"That's all right—that's all right." She nodded her head knowingly. "I'll teach her——"

Mr. Argush burst out laughing. He slapped his wife on her pudgy shoulder. Louis went out. Mrs. Argush beckoned to Minnie to follow him.

In the hall Louis, in a low, shamed voice, asked for a kiss. She drew away.

"Oh, no!" How she wished he and the Argushes wouldn't bother her!

Louis stepped closer; he looked down from his greater height upon the slip of a girl, shaking as with cold.

"But we're engaged," he pleaded.

She drew farther away. He took hold of her arm.

"Just one," he begged and seemed so eager, so anxious, that she consented.

He kissed her once, hard, so that the Argushes, peeping through the crack of the door, burst into a simultaneous laugh. Louis, startled, walked quickly off without even bidding Minnie good-by.

XX

The next day Minnie meditated upon her new position. She was going to be married to Louis the "paintner." She no longer needed to worry about Olga Chernin's dismissal; and she didn't have to look for work in a shop. What would her people say if they knew she was going to be married? What would Olga say? How funny that just when she and Gregory were getting to be friendly

the whole upset should come. Was anybody going to marry Gregory, too? She wished she could marry Gregory instead of Louis. Maybe she would. Some people, like her mother, married twice. She hoped if she ever had children she would not neglect them even if she married a second time. Louis hadn't kissed her like Joe, so that his teeth touched hers. If Gregory kissed her, would he kiss her like Louis or like Joe? She wished he had kissed her. She would have liked to know.

She walked aimlessly through the streets, feeling remote from herself and remote from everything around her. It was so queer not to be full of worries—the worry of having to keep secret the card-playing from the Argushes, the worry of having to look for work in a shop, the worry of dreading a foreman. She missed something, as one misses the nuisance of an umbrella after a spell of rain. And everything she did seemed purposeless. She was bound for no definite destination, nothing about her held any interest, she was cheerless, lonely, and felt like crying. Her limbs ached. She was tired. She thought of little Beckie, and grew homesick. She thought of her mother, and grew angry, she thought of Louis and felt afraid, she thought of the Argushes and wished she did not need to see them soon again.

In an effort to make things seem more real, she shook off her thoughts and looked around, at the people, the houses, the shops. She happened to be standing in front of one of the cheaper class of department stores, Grindem & Gold, and looked in through the glass doors at the humming activity inside. Something—she could not have told what—drew her in. A throng of people were hur-

rying to and fro. The store was seething with the animation of the Christmas season.

The Christmas season! The "rush" season! All were busy.

Her heart leaped with its old ambition. Work in an office! She tingled. Resolutely she advanced farther into the store and approached a floorwalker, who directed her to the manager's office.

Grindem & Gold's kindly Employer of Labor contemplated the girl with a bit of amusement as she earnestly set forth her qualifications to do office work. "I'm a high-school girl and I'm *very* good in penmanship."

He looked into space and stroked his beard as if in debate with himself.

"Will you be willing to work evenings until Christmas?"

A thrill of excited exultation sent the blood to her head. Maybe work in an office at last! Leaning forward eagerly and quite forgetting the superiority of the addressed, she cried:

"Oh, sure, if it's in an *office*——" She remained in an expectant attitude, her mouth slightly open, as if her very life depended upon the man's reply.

"Well," he pretended to demur, attempting to hide a smile, "sure you won't fall asleep?"

"No, sir!" Minnie solemnly assured him and leaned back in her chair, her manner seeming to add: "If that's all you're afraid of, you needn't be."

"All right," he said with a smile, "we'll start you on three dollars a week and give you a raise if you're conscientious!"

Minnie held out her hands for a fraction of a moment

like a child receiving a gift. Her heart sang: "I'm so happy! so happy! so happy!"

"Come with me," said the man, who had another errand to take him the same way, so that this time, when she could have run up many stairs with the sprightliness of the happy, she was conducted into an elevator! What a contrary way life has of managing itself!

XXI

Among the Grindem & Gold Department Store employees of four weeks' standing and more a Great Impetus existed, the promise of a Christmas gift equal to one week's wages. The men and women and little boys and little girls applied themselves to their labors as if to earn their way to a very heaven. They sweated and they toiled for the Luscious Bait.

At ten at night heads of salespeople were still bent over counters, cash boys and cash girls still raced up and down aisles in pursuit of floorwalkers, parcels, change of coin. The eyes of all were glassy with the excitement and the foul air.

In the auditing department, busiest of all, the clerks stayed at work until midnight! It was only for a short time, only until Christmas, and with a week's extra wages as the reward, who would think of complaining? Now and then a girl fainted, or began to cry for no reason at all; a boy or a man suddenly felt a desperate need for a glass of water. But it would all soon be over; there were only ten days before Christmas.

The department store, in its lively conscience about keeping its employees working overtime, provided evening meals gratis. Every few nights the employees were sent

for a treat into the store's regular dining-room; on other nights sandwiches were handed around and each employee was allowed a half hour of respite. There were some who ate ravenously, but, alas, not Minnie! One does not so readily overcome a sacred prejudice against the hog. The home of the Argushes was kept "kosher;" in her own home Minnie had been brought up in adherence to the "kosher," from which Sarah, for all her religious skepticism, never deviated. So how could she promptly fall on the neck, so to speak, of the non-kosher, and devour it? The usual ham sandwiches were certainly out of the question, and the meals served in the dining-room did not present a religious aspect either, while the other foods had strange names and looked strange.

Upon breakfasts of nothing and lunches of wurst and bread and mustard came suppers of nothing. But, then, for Minnie, too, it was only for a short time. Besides, working in an office was nourishment to the soul.

The days passed. It was Christmas Eve. At six o'clock a dead hush fell upon the Season's Rush. Men and women dropped and sent up a prayer of thanks. Lines of employees formed before the windows of the paying tellers. Boys and girls giggled nervously. All were wearily but happily anticipating the Luscious Bait.

Minnie, almost too tired to remain upright on her feet, stood in line among the others. The air in the store was so warm and thick that she had the sensation of breathing in a solid. Her head every once in a while swam dizzily; she would brace herself with the thought that to-morrow was a holiday—and the Doubled Wage! She had long wanted a gray, ready-to-wear skirt, and she had long needed a pair of shoes. Though Louis had coaxed, she had refused to buy these with his money.

The paying teller called her name and handed her an envelope.

"Thank you," she said and stepped out of the line. A few feet away she opened the flimsy yellow envelope and found—three dollars enclosed!

She turned back, disregarding the next in line.

"Please, mister," she cried nervously, "it's a mistake——"

The paying teller turned to her.

"What's a mistake?"

"It's only three dollars."

The paying teller took the envelope from her extended hand and looked up his records. Minnie stood trembling and throbbing.

"Say, what do you think," he threw out from behind the bars of his cage, "we're giving money *away* here? You're only here three weeks and two days. You came too late."

Too late! Minnie stood condemned, dumfounded. So it took four weeks in full to earn the Double Wage! She had never expected that they would count those few days. She stood rooted to the spot. Several girls giggled. A boy called: "Say, sissy, get a move on." She glanced hastily down the length of the line and flushed hotly. She had made a fool of herself!

Oh, to hide or run away! But quick escape was impossible. She had still to get her hat and coat from the seventh floor. Afraid that in the elevator she might encounter someone who had seen her make a fool of herself, she walked up the seven flights of stairs—ran them, in fact. When she reached the top landing, darkness suddenly closed down on her, the floor slipped from be-

neath her feet. The next she knew she was lying in the auditing office, and, oh, how her body ached!

"I'm so tired!" she moaned. She ached as if she had been beaten. She turned her head away from the woman manager, who had detected in Minnie "a bright little girl," and was gently administering spirits of ammonia.

"Does the little girl feel better?" she asked.

"I'm so tired!"

"You'll rest all day to-morrow, dear."

An hour later a very pale Minnie, unsteady on her feet, was putting on her hat and coat.

"I hope you'll be all right and will come back after Christmas," said the manager.

But Minnie never came back, and no one in the store ever tried to discover why. No cog in any machinery is dispensed with so lightly as is the human cog in the machinery of human affairs.

XXII

Leaving Grindem & Gold's, Minnie, her nerves so on edge that every sound felt like a lash on her bruised body, retreated to a quiet side street lined with brown-stone houses, which told of a past aristocracy. She could hardly drag herself along and soon realized she was going to faint again. She gave a desperate glance around. A doctor's sign caught her eye. Without reflection she labored up the high stoop and pulled the bell. A nurse in uniform opened the door upon a little girl in a heap in the vestibule.

When Minnie regained consciousness she found herself on a bed with Doctor Joel and Miss Grayson at her side, talking in low voices and smiling kindly into her

eyes. The doctor, giving Miss Grayson instructions to let her rest, went out of the room.

Aching, weary and sick, Minnie asked no questions. She kept her eyes closed, occasionally moved from side to side, and moaned. The nurse ministered to her in one small way or another.

It seemed a long while before the doctor appeared again.

"Do you feel better?"

"Yes, I feel all right." Minnie fingered her hair nervously.

"All right?" Doctor Joel smiled. She wanted to rise. "There, dear, no, no, just lie still." Doctor Joel's gentleness brought a lump to Minnie's throat. She was ripe for abundant emotional response to the slightest friendliness.

When he left, she turned her head to look out of the window, which was close to the bed. With a relaxation like that which she had felt when lying alone in the home on Gregory's cot, she remarked what a clean, quiet street this was and what a contrast the atmosphere of repose to the hubbub of Henry and Rivington and Madison Streets. Soon the sense of relief passed. Thoughts began to assail her. The women passing seemed so different from Mrs. Argush, so much quieter, not as if they were forever talking, forever bustling, and the men not as if they were insisting upon girls marrying them. Louis, disappointed that she had taken work instead of beginning wedding preparations, had tried every night to make her understand that her conduct was reprehensible. Then, too, he was so demonstrative that Minnie was constantly reminded with horror of the doctor, and when Louis insisted that since they were engaged his behavior was

all right, she was completely dismayed. To her even greater consternation, Mrs. Argush not only upheld Louis, but told Minnie it was her duty to respond, and the exactions of marriage would be still greater. The girl had a nightmare sense of being pursued by something ugly and monstrous.

A stabbing pain in the region of her heart recalled her from these thoughts. She stirred and moaned.

"What is it, dear?" asked Miss Grayson.

"Nothing."

Perhaps, it occurred to Minnie, she was staying too long.

"I'll dirty the bed," she muttered, bringing her thumb to her mouth and sitting up, her sensitiveness overcoming her weakness. But only for an instant. Her heart began to pound and her breath came hard and short.

"It's all right—you won't soil the bed." The nurse gently forced her down.

The doctor came in and conferred with the nurse in whispers, then approached the bedside and asked Minnie her name.

"Where do you live, Mildred? I'll take you to your mother in my carriage, yes?"

Home! Mother! The Argush kitchen! Louis the painter! . . . No, no, no, she wouldn't go home—she wouldn't go to the Argush kitchen—she wouldn't go to Louis! She hated—hated—hated it all. She could not stand it.

Setting her lips tight, stiffening in every limb and fiber, she said slowly and decidedly that she had no mother or father or home; she had lived with strangers who had moved away and she was free to be disposed of as the doctor saw fit.

Not a quiver, not a tear. Hers was not the spirit of the beggar wanting to rouse pity. It was the spirit of desperate resolution. Like her mother before her, who had reached out for the theft of a hat band, Minnie reached out for the theft of a fresh start.

Her manner discountenanced disbelief and further questioning. A remark or two, and it was decided that she stay until Dr. Joel find room for her in a "nice place where there were other nice girls and she would have a fine time romping and playing and jumping until she got to be a big, strong girl."

"Am I sick?"

The doctor looked down upon her with fatherly tenderness. He nodded his head affirmatively.

"What's the matter with me?"

There was such an air of maturity and independence about this child, that Dr. Joel felt he did not have to conceal her true condition from her.

Heart trouble! It sounded far worse than she felt herself to be. After a little reflection, she said sulkily, as though unwilling to believe him:

"I was well yesterday."

"You were *not* well yesterday." Dr. Joel shook his head emphatically. He added softly, as if he meant no one to hear: "They live against all the laws of nature all their lives, and when they get sick they think it happened over night!"

Minnie started. "*Against all the laws of nature!*" The scene of Mira, her mother, her sick father, Doctor Levin, flashed upon her mind. Her father had *died* from "living against all the laws of nature!"

Dr. Joel and Miss Grayson were startled by a shrill, hysterical shriek, followed by another and another in

quick succession. Minnie had seen a hideous apparition. She clung to the doctor and the nurse.

"Don't—don't make me go back!" she cried.

XXIII

The Helina Heimath was a vast, elegant structure, as if with forethought stuck in a suburb away from the eye of society that society might not have flaunted before it its completed work, humanity wrecked, beaten.

Its chief directors were two men linked in philanthropy as in business, Y. Nat (the gentleman's idiosyncratic abbreviation of Nathan) Grindem and Owen Gold.

Carved upon a stone plate above the entrance door were the words, "For Incurables," which seemed to say in their implacableness that here was merely a wayside inn on the road to the hereafter. Immediately inside the building one felt the obligatoriness of hush and involuntarily assumed a solemn demeanor and subdued one's tones to a whisper. In the heart of the building, away from its outward stateliness and corridor dignity, one came upon a desolate barrenness, a conscientious absence of all non-essentials, an absolute lack of aestheticism and pretty comforts, which at once proclaimed it to all the senses a place for poor people. Not a single cushioned chair or cosy corner; not a single sign of ease or warm decoration, as if these had been omitted for prudential reasons—because the inmates might come to look upon them as necessities and make exaggerated demands instead of appreciating what they were receiving. Everything bespoke stability, practicability, to the very dishes of the coarsest heavy stoneware. And pervading the

whole place was the smell of the poor, that unmistakable sourish smell.

Instead of the peaceful harmony due the invalid for his environment there was a seething turmoil, inevitable in the promiscuous herding together of people, which came to a hush only when it spent itself or on occasions of detecting eyes.

The first weeks, when Minnie was confined to bed, she was too ill to make observations, too close to the old life for other thought. In the way of invalids, her mind dwelt upon herself. The fear that Louis might discover her whereabouts haunted her persistently. (But the poor "paintner," who lost the paramount inspiration of his life, never learned what became of his *kalle*. And as for the Argushes, they congratulated Louis upon his escape from a *meen mudner mensch* (a queer person); for that, they were now convinced all over again, *was* what Minnie was). She also lived in constant dread that Dr. Joel would discover she had not told him the truth when she had said she was an orphan. From her own point of view, she felt she had told the truth; spiritually she was an orphan; but she sensed vaguely that others would see no justification for her feeling so, that they could imbibe only the obvious.

As her health improved her mood of introspection, naturally, passed and she began to observe the panorama before her. All sorts of distorted forms upon beds, all degrees of emaciation, all shades of pallor, all sorts of maimed upon wheel chairs, or struggling along by the aid of sticks or crutches.

Like herself they were veterans of the war of life. Minnie knew it; she knew they had worked hard like herself, had eaten suppers alternate nights, or less, had gone

breakfastless. They had lived against all the laws of nature! But it reached her understanding only dimly that behind her destruction and theirs was the *whole* of life with its ebb and flow, of which she and they were the scum it threw off, and she perceived only dimly that this vast charity was as much a monument to human treachery as to human goodness, though she realized there was something not exactly fitting in the positions that Grindem and Gold held in this philanthropy when employees in their large store were given wages that necessitated "living against all the laws of nature." But exactly wherein lay the unfitness or how it was to be remedied, Minnie did not know.

There was one thing, however, about which she was clear and definitely bitter; the ladies of the Aid Society of the Helina Heimath, a group of rich women who came at regular intervals to bestow small gifts; an orange, a brick of ice cream, a piece of cake, a cup of cocoa. Their clothes were always of an expensive, subdued suitability, of an elegant propriety; they always extolled the "view" from the windows of the Heimath as "perfectly lovely," as if they were cracking up a broken toy to a child. It seemed to delight them immensely that the bed linens were very white, and they seemed to want to impress upon the inmates the fact that they had much to be grateful for. "Why, if they think it is so lovely, don't *they* come here when they are sick?" Minnie would think. Yet when one of the ladies stopped to have a chat with her, she was surprised to find she liked the lady and would be ashamed of her previous hard feelings. "I guess I'm jealous," she would say to herself. Her eyes would fill with tears, and her young heart would ache with a vague disappointment. She was, as a matter of

fact, jealous; she had not conceived of dependence in connection with herself; when she had pictured herself a "grown-up lady" it had been as one exactly like these who now patronized her. She resented her failure; she was disappointed in life.

One visiting day, when the inmates were sitting round the large ward with affectionate relatives by their sides and bundles of better eatables than the Heimath afforded spread open on their laps, a great homesickness came over her. No one visited her or cared for her; no one *would* ever come to see her. Was there really no one to come to see her? Jacob sprang to her mind; he was away from home and was probably feeling as deserted as she. She would ask him to come. She would caution him not to tell any of the others. The thought possessed her; she grew as excited as if she had discovered a cure for all her heartaches. She wrote to Jacob in delirious haste. When she had deposited the letter in the mail box, she retired to the one spot of privacy the Heimath had to offer, the bathroom, where, sitting on the edge of the tub, she shed bitter tears of loneliness.

The following Sunday, Jacob stood in the line of visitors on the street, impatient for the doors to open. His mind busily speculated as to the condition in which he would find his sister who had written that she had been at the hospital six months. He was worried by visions of her reduced to a skeleton, bedridden, in fever, moaning, groaning.

Minnie stood at the window, her eyes feverishly traveling along the line of visitors until she spied her brother. At sight of him she quivered from top to toe. Her heart pounded. Would the line ever move! She looked again to make sure it was he. Yes, it was. He was the only

one in the world who lifted his hand like that. (It was a warm day, and Jacob was wiping the perspiration from his forehead.) She felt love for him for this very uniqueness of gesture. The sound of "brother" brought a glow to her heart, a lump to her throat. Oh, if the line would only begin to move! At last it moved. She ran to the door by which Jacob would enter the ward.

She was taller, stouter, and more fully developed than when she had left home, and though her hair still hung down her back in a plait, there was a subtle maturity and dignity about her. Indeed, the superintendent of the institution, a man of portly belly and big shaggy beard, which lent him an air of authority, referred to her (and her fellow patients, imitating him, did the same) as "princess," especially when she slighted her rations at table in accord with the dictates of her palate.

Jacob, entering the door, fairly gasped. Sick! Why, she was twice as fat as she had ever been! He felt indignant, as if he had been duped.

Jacob was having his own troubles. Sharing the home of the uncle with whom he lived was a daughter whom the Potter had moulded most unprepossessing. She was large and dark and clumsy of feature; moreover, she had a foolish laugh and no brains. Jacob could not abide her. Since she found as little favor with young men other than her cousin, her mother and father were acting in a partnership conspiracy to palm her off on Jacob. They would detain him for conversation: they would encourage him to the point of compulsion to take her out; they would make every opportunity for his contact with her; into all of which she herself entered with the greatest alacrity. Now, Jacob throughout his life maintained a sort of aloofness from people, and for him to dwell in

the same house as the family was really the greatest hardship; while as for coming into actually intimate contact with them, especially with such an unattractive creature as Lena, was sheer torture. The thing disturbed him so, so weighed him down that you might have thought that he, of all people in the world, was the one whom Fate had singled out for martyrdom.

Here stood Minnie, robust, after having added a week of great worry to his already worried mind.

His frigid response to her eager greeting was like a dash of ice water. No one in the world cared a bit for her. She was alone, altogether alone. Her heart was wrung.

She led him silently into the ward, and they sat down.

"Why did you tell me you were sick? Did you think you had to frighten me to bring me?"

She hesitated and smiled diffidently as she said: "I don't look sick now, do I?"

"SICK! You look ten times better than I." His heart went out in an abundance of self-pity.

Minnie's eyes misted. "But I *was* quite sick," she said. "I used to faint a lot."

Jacob had his doubts.

"How was it you waited until *this* late date, then, to call me?"

"I didn't want to tell you sooner. I waited until I was better on purpose, because I didn't want you to think I wasn't getting along."

Jacob's soul laughed. Indeed, it was very *likely* that she would do that! Why was she telling him now, as if it weren't the same thing! Very likely that *she* would keep her troubles from folks. It took *him* to be silent.

There he was with worries reaching over his head saying not a word to anybody.

"You frightened me. I thought you were dying. I suppose you think I have nothing else to worry about."

Because she had been so sure that he was as homesick for her as she for him, his words fell with their sharpest edge upon her heart. Her color rose. She was outraged. How much she had suffered without ever even dreaming of calling any of them to her aid! And Jacob was wholly distorting the spirit of her invitation, ready to charge her with having no consideration. How she hated him! Her self-control snapped.

"If you are so sorry you came," she burst out, "you had better go right back. You'll wait all your life before I will want to see you again. I hate you." She rose from her chair, facing him with fine dignity.

He rose, too. After he had come all that way, after he had made the sacrifice of refusing an invitation to join one of his friends in an outing, after he had worried about her all the week, she had the impudence to insult him! He dashed out.

From the Helina Heimath he went straight to the family and delivered himself of his grievance.

"She chased me out," was his description of the finale of his visit.

Sarah had given many an hour's worrisome thought to Minnie during the months that had passed since the children had seen her and the earth afterward, as it seemed, had swallowed her up. She never walked the streets without keeping a constant lookout; perhaps she would meet her here—perhaps she would see her there. Once she happened to be in a millinery shop when the proprietor sent a message to a Minnie in the work-room be

hind the shop. It might be her Minnie! She insisted, without explaining why she did so, upon being let into the work-room. It was not her Minnie. Her heart sank.

At last Jacob came with word of her child.

She made light of his complaint. "So long we missed her, a brother ought to be glad to know his sister is alive."

Sarah was changed. The double rôle of wife to a second husband and mother to his stepchildren had re-awakened the qualities of patience and endurance in her. The pain and anxiety of witnessing the conflict of these two elements, both of whom engaged her love, had subdued her, roused her again, as it were, out of self into the wife and mother. Success of the bands business was subordinated to peace. She no more indulged herself in bursts of anger and faultfinding; instead she went about as pacifier and mollifier, begging the children to avoid irritating Leopold, and Leopold to be patient with the children. With a tear or a sigh she would tacitly remind him of the two runaways, about whom Leopold, in reality, also brooded.

Since Jacob vowed he was done with Minnie, Sarah insisted that Beckie and Ida go to see her the very next Sunday. They, too, brought back news that she looked robust and had developed into a "regular lady," and Sarah shed tears of thanksgiving.

For weeks she went about with the one feeling that if she could see Minnie. she would have nothing more to wish for. But though she had the impulse every Sunday to join Beckie and Ida on their now regular weekly visits, something in her heart held her back. She hated to admit to herself how guilty she must seem in the eyes of the too-harsh Minnie. She had sacrificed an oldest

daughter for a husband. If the penalty was grief, she was paying it generously. How hard children could be! After all, if Minnie were not a child, she would understand; she would not be so hard on her mother.

One Sunday Ida and Beckie, who wanted to go on a trip to Fort George with some of Ida's schoolmates, asked to be let off from visiting Minnie. Sarah first used persuasion, telling them it was their duty to visit their sister, then, as she failed to achieve the desired result, she burst into a volume of complaint, contrary to the present standards, charging them with being thoughtless of Minnie, who would be waiting for them and would "cry her eyes out." But the children insisted they had a right to have fun one Sunday once in a while and went their way.

Left alone, as Leopold had gone to a lodge meeting, Sarah abandoned herself to a fit of weeping. Was ever mother given so many causes for pain as she? Always she was torn by a thousand miseries. The children really did have a right to take one Sunday for recreation. Yet Minnie would wait for them and she would doubtless be heartbroken. Sarah sighed and sighed as she went about the house dully. Life was too bitter, life was too bitter. It was tears, tears, tears, if not for want of bread then for other things, never had she known a day free from care or sadness.

Then her heart was carried on a new wave of thought to Minnie. Minnie, too, was having a hard life. She had been sick. Many things, doubtless, had made her sick. Child that she was, she had carried her resolution to be independent to the very limit, until it had made her sick. Goodness knew where she had lived, what she had eaten, whether in the winter she had worn warm underwear. Her Minnie was to have a life like hers—full of

struggle, full of suffering. Because her nature was the very same as her mother's—firm, determined to fight the fates—the fates would play the game with her. She could not stand it another day—not another minute—she had to see the child—her oldest girl—dear to her as the others.

She went into the bedroom, rummaged in a bureau drawer for a fresh handkerchief, and stood a few moments weeping into it, then pulled down her shirtwaist, brushed her hair, put on her hat and walked resolutely out.

Though she took the car that she had heard the children say went to the Helina Heimath, she rose nervously time and again to ask the conductor if they had not already passed the place—it was taking so long. But when finally a big voice called out Helina Heimath, Sarah remained seated, her mind a thousand leagues away, occupied with Jacob's fate at Minnie's hands. Would Minnie chase her out, too? She felt as if she could not stand it, as if her heart must break if that came to pass. With such a wilful girl as Minnie, who could tell what her imagined grievances could not lead her to do? Perhaps she so blamed her only mother that she could slap her face. God! God! what a hard life!

"Wake up, missus," the conductor roared, "ain't you been asking all day for the Helina Heimath?"

Sarah blinked. Hastily gathering together three purple asters, which she had stopped to buy for Minnie, she scrambled out.

She saw a huge, gray building. She stopped short. The place seemed familiar. She looked at the front door. Yes, that was the entrance. Good God! *the country!* the place where the girl's father had died! How

could one bear all! The cry went through her soul in weird minor notes like a wind dying out. She remembered instantly with what a heavy heart, with what labored footsteps she had ascended that same stoop before. She lived through again every sensation of fright, every sensation of grief, all the torture, and misery, and despair following Elias's death. . . . Minnie was *here!*—here where her father had died! . . . What a life—what a life! . . . She felt as if she could not bear another moment of it; as if she would find comfort in disappearing under the stones of the pavement. She kept her head bowed and her eyes, with the look in them of a soul in torture, riveted to the ground.

Aimlessly, with a lassitude pathetic in one so full of energy, she walked round and round and round the block thinking, marvelling, almost like a child, at the complexity of her life, how from girlhood on everything had always happened to involve her in a fate darker than that of any of the women she had known. Even Mira, that red-headed, coarse Mira, had fared so much better than she. What had she ever done to deserve it all—not to be a mother in peace, not to be a wife in peace; and to have known such poverty as she had known, to have struggled, struggled for whom more than for her children?—And now her oldest daughter, the oldest daughter in whom all mothers took the greatest pride, was landed in a home for incurables, in the same home where her father had been at the time of their desperate poverty! As if Minnie needed to have had such a thing befall her; if only the girl had been reasonably tolerant, reasonably obedient, reasonably agreeable. What an unlucky woman she was, what an unlucky woman!

She passed the entrance door for visitors again, as she

had a number of times, without noticing that the people had not only been in but had also come out and the place was already closed to visitors. She stood turning the knob of the gate, looking helplessly up at the mute structure. A hand motioned to her from a window in a wing of the building, directing her to the front entrance.

She ascended the stoop of old. Something in her heart moaned, and such a heavy sigh escaped her, such a hunted look was on her face that the doorkeeper informed her with especial courtesy that the visiting-hour was over, and even added that he was sorry.

Sarah slunk off like a beaten animal, while Minnie, having watched and waited for her two sisters like a sufferer for relief, locked herself in the bathroom and shed the tears of the forlorn. No one cared for her. They had come a few weeks and now they meant to come no more. It was too much "bother." Nobody loved her.

XXIV

Another month, and the Heimath's gift of an opportunity for proper living had rendered Minnie a remarkable contradiction to its "incurable" character. She looked hale and hearty. Indeed, the board of directors and the Ladies of the Aid Society, upheld in their opinion by the superintendent, who took his clue from the medical end of the establishment, began to think seriously of discharging her.

In earnest consultation assembled, the wielders of destinies in the Helina Heimath, the Directors and the Ladies, discussed what to do with Minnie now that she was ready to be discharged.

Minnie Mendel, aged sixteen and a half, unkindly

treated at home by a stepfather—where could she be placed to live? A number of propositions were considered, and finally the suggestion that she be lodged at the Alpha Home for Working Girls was put in the form of a motion, seconded, duly debated, and carried. Next came the problem of her livelihood. The Alpha Home required three dollars a week for her maintenance. Had the girl a trade? No. There followed silent interrogation of eyes, then a portly gentleman of excellent decorum and without doubt of a good heart, else why should he have left his easy chair at home for the mission of alms, whose every gesture indicated that he was accustomed to handling matters of far greater import than the mere placing of a girl at a trade, offered his metal establishment as a solution. This proposal, too, was moved and seconded and carried; and the case of Mildred Mendel was dismissed; there were other cases up that needed similar consideration.

The announcement of her discharge was a shock at first to Minnie, filling her with terror of a repetition of her old life. Then she was glad. It was impossible that she would have to live again in a kitchen on the East Side, or work in a shop. They knew it had been this that had made her sick, and after having gone to all the trouble of curing her, what sense would there be in sending her back to such conditions? Yet she had relapses to fear. What, what if they were, after all, to make her go back to a shop, to a store and to the East Side! She had no profession or trade and she had no money. What would become of her?

At night when the other patients in the ward were asleep, her eyes wandered over their forms of divers distortions, bedridden for the rest of life perhaps; and even

though her heart ached for them, it gladdened for herself, that she was better, that she could leave the bed of charity for the world of independence. "But only if I don't have to work in a shop—*only* if I could have a room for myself in a clean place! Dear me! that isn't asking for so much! So many people have it, why can't I? I would be so happy!" Here the tears would come and she would have to draw the covers over her head to keep the others from hearing her weep.

As if in answer to her prayer, one of the ladies of the Aid Society came to her one day and after stroking her hair, which she proclaimed was arranged in a pompadour that was "just the thing" and smiling down upon her benignly, told her that this experience of hers was to be followed by one at least equally as wonderful, that she was to live in the Alpha Home for Working Girls, "a nice, clean, lovely home for girls, a perfectly splendid place."

The girl's heart turned a somersault for joy. Hadn't she just known that the past could not repeat itself!

For days she trod on air, her joy expressing itself in dreams of coming back to the Heimath on visits with a large bundle of foodstuffs, cheese, smoked salmon, sweet butter, dill pickles, olives, herring. Each patient was to receive her favorite delicacy. She would live through scene after scene of the sort until she fell into a state of delicious eagerness for the time to arrive when she would be leaving.

One day word came from the superintendent's quarters that she was to accompany an attendant to Maiden Lane to make arrangements for a position.

As if by magic the heavens turned suddenly pitch-black. Minnie's heart stood still, then hammered and

hammered. Oh, God, not a shop! Not a store! Not a shop! When her mind interfered with common sense to ask what else she was prepared to do, she wanted to strike at it with her fists. What right had it to come in with its practical complacency. If only it would be an office, not a store, not a shop! Oh, if only it would be an office! Maybe now there were offices that did not always want shorthand. She could put her hair up and look more like "a grown-up lady."

Trembling with nervousness she lent herself to some half-dozen hands and as many contrary opinions for dressing up. One woman tied her hair with a red ribbon, another one's opinion prevailed that black was more suitable. One told her to wear a one-piece dress, another a waist and skirt.

The patients stood at the window, some half-dozen of them, waving her good-by, envious and sympathetic. When she turned out of sight, they moved away, sighing, already wondering when she would come back and whether she would procure the position. Probably it was "by a director"—no small honor. Indeed, one needed to be "smart," "an American one," to aspire to such a place.

Three hours later Minnie returned, her lips tight-set, her face pale. The friendly patients came eagerly forward. With a single glance she frightened them away and walked fast and stiffly to her bed, where she stood for a moment rigid, then fell upon it in a heap, shrieking hysterically. The medical profession was brought hurrying upon the scene. She was questioned.

"I WON'T work in a shop! I WON'T! I'd sooner die!" she cried.

Her sobs were the tune of a deep hatred that was gripping her soul, a hatred of the circumstances that made

her subject to the will of others. The Helina Heimath suddenly loomed up as the epitome of all horror, as a dumping ground for ruined humans, and a soul repair shop for the conscience-stricken rich that they might not lose their chance also in heaven. She hated it—hated her dependence. She swore she would be a dependent no more, never in her life again.

That their good work should not be undone, the authorities of the Heimath readily agreed that some plan should be devised more in accord with the girl's own desires. She was consulted. She wanted to learn shorthand. And shorthand she was taught—by Sarah's "golden lady."

The first person Minnie had met when Dr. Joel brought her to the Helina Heimath was Ella Liebman, who was now secretary there. It had instantly sprung into Minnie's mind—and greatly worried her—that here was someone who knew of her past and would disillusion Dr. Joel concerning her orphanhood. One day she made a clean breast of it.

"Miss Liebman," she said, "I told Dr. Joel I have no mother. The truth is, my mother married a man who, though he was recommended by friends——"

Miss Liebman laughed, long and merrily, but in so indulgent a tone and with such an affectionate look, that Minnie went on:

"And he turned out very mean and I left home——"

Miss Liebman divined the girl's fears.

"We understand. Don't worry," she said.

Thereafter she became *Minnie's* "golden lady."

PART II
SARAH'S DAUGHTER

PART II

SARAH'S DAUGHTER

Minnie sat at the small table in her small, neat room in the Alpha Home for Working Girls, a pad of paper, ink and a newspaper before her. She wrote:

"I beg leave to make application for the position of stenographer as per your advertisement in this morning's *New York World*."

A novel sense of dignity warmed her soul. A full-fledged stenographer! An office to be her objective—and nothing in the way to bar her. What different times from those of the Titanic Biscuit Company! Those awful days! She sighed. Though those times seemed already in the distant past, thought of them made one sigh—made one's gladness in a present seem a bit lop-sided somehow. "How could mama have been so indifferent!" she wondered as she sat chewing the end of her penholder, her eyes staring into vacancy. "I might have been ruined by Joe—by that doctor. I might have married Louis. What a baby I was!" Her sophisticated companions at the Heimath had taught Minnie things.

The summons bell rang in the hall and in a moment a girl's voice called: "Mildred Mendel, the superintendent wants you in her office."

Fifteen minutes later Minnie was seated in the street car all excited because she was on the way to see about a position as stenographer which the superintendent had

thought she could fill. . . . In an hour she came back bubbling over with happiness, for she had been found satisfactory and had been engaged. At the door of the Alpha Home her happy bubbles broke. She was met by the girl who had summoned her to the superintendent's office, and was asked:

"Well, did you get the position?"

"Yes."

"Yes? Oh, how nice. Where—in what place?"

In what place? The *place* had not occurred to Minnie, somehow it had not mattered. Minnie stood for a moment speechless. She dropped her eyes and voice:

"Why, the Peoples Charities——" she replied.

A queer sensation played in her breast as she made her way to the superintendent's office to tell the result of her interview. "What would mama say, I wonder!" she was thinking.

* * * * *

Among her duties was interviewing applicants. She found herself the first day, while waiting for the chief clerk to bring her working paraphernalia, facing a roomful of drab humanity in the Employment Bureau in the basement of the Peoples Charities building. How curiously alike they all looked—though their features were so different! They were scrutinizing the new "Lady" with a hush upon them, broken by subdued whispers, which marks people under constraint. In their humble hearts was awe, the shadow of dependence. Was it their obvious awe of the new personage behind the desk that caused Minnie to straighten up in her chair with a slender feeling of self-esteem? A very slender feeling and one that soon passed.

"How haggard and anxious they look!" Her young

heart ached for this lot of suffering humanity, huddled together in this stuffy basement. She strained her eyes to see them more clearly as if to bring the realness of themselves *to* themselves closer to herself. They were human beings just as her mother was a human being, who, like them, had once sat right there waiting for the very same thing, to be given work as if it were charity. She in one of their seats would seem as strange to another seated where she was. In the Helina Heimath she had doubtless seemed as strange to a visitor.

The chief clerk appeared to put her to work.

The first days of her new position were hard. Like all sensitive people, Minnie stood in awe of her superiors, was, as a consequence, easily rattled and made blunders. But she fought hard with herself, and if she did not overcome her nervousness, she at least managed to conceal it. She rested her elbow on the desk to steady her trembling hand and questioned the applicants in the lowest voice to keep others from detecting her shyness.

* * * * *

Months passed, each day bringing a host of wretched human beings to the Charities doors. There were old faces, new faces, old tales, new tales.

Though poverty was no secret to Minnie, she had never before consciously appreciated the endless sordidness with which it joined hands. Beginning with the physical ugliness to which it reduced its victims, the demon forged on and on tirelessly, mercilessly, driving men to desert women, women to loathe men, children to curse both.

Minnie suffered. She walked about with a troubled face and such an abstracted manner that her co-workers put her down as queer, and smiled and talked about her in whispers.

In her mental struggle Minnie would appeal to Miss Liebman. Teacher and pupil had become close friends. Did Miss Liebman think there was a God? Did she think He approved of poverty? Did she think the poor themselves were responsible for their poverty? But if they were ignorant, untrained, diseased, how could they be held responsible any more than a man may be held responsible for a hooked nose?

Ella Liebman, who had gone through precisely such a period of spiritual unrest, understood and sympathized, but in her greater wisdom, she suggested that it was better not to think about such things since one never reached a conclusion. Far from satisfying, this only made Minnie the more restless and caused her to long for sympathetic companionship.

Now and then she made advances to her fellow-workers; but if her aloofness seemed queer to them, her talk seemed still queerer. Did anyone ever hear of such a thing as whether a person deserved to be poor! A man was poor—sufficient explanation in itself, and the end of it. Did *God* approve of poverty? As if everything were not in God's hands, including the power to make a man rich or poor.

They flocked together, called Minnie a "nut" and forthwith took every opportunity to avoid her. And Minnie now avoided them with ten times the conscientiousness that they avoided her.

Occasionally she tried to talk to the Alpha Home girls, but never felt drawn to any of them.

But still she yearned for companionship, for someone with whom she could talk. A few times she tried to unburden herself to Ida and Beckie, who often visited her. Beckie would listen even if she did not understand; but

Ida, who was bored and disgusted, would find pretexts for interrupting. Had Minnie seen the cat that just passed? Did she feel hot or cold? And such obvious boredom invariably played upon her face that Minnie, flushing, was reduced to silence.

Often Minnie wondered what sort of a person Abie Ratkin was now grown into and whether he wondered the same about her. And Gregory Chernin, what was he like now? Did he and Abie have other girls for friends? A sigh.

Late one evening, coming home from a walk, she passed the sitting-room and looked in enviously at the girls talking and laughing. Amelia Rubin, a Russian-Jewish shirtwaist operator, who sat next to Minnie at table, but to whom Minnie had paid no attention because of her foreignness, called to Minnie eagerly to come in. She was at a loss to entertain her "gentleman caller."

Minnie walked in shyly.

In a broad, foreign accent Amelia Rubin introduced Morris Caplan, a medium-sized man of about thirty-six, who rose clumsily and acknowledged the introduction with "Pleezed te mee' che!" A heavy gold watch chain threaded through a lower buttonhole of his waistcoat and draped over to a pocket, called attention to his slight tendency to a paunch. Upon his large, healthily colored face set with a broad nose, generous mouth and kind blue eyes, there played a smile of good nature.

Amelia Rubin, a thin, weazened little creature, wearing an unpretty, stiffly-starched shirtwaist, which brought out the lines of bitterness on her small, sallow face and, by creasing in the back, exaggerated the roundness of her shoulders, brushed loose strands of her straight black

hair away from her ears and screwed up her small brown eyes.

"Mr. Caplan," she said, addressing Minnie in an aggrieved tone, "don't believe it that it's worser half slavery like whole."

Mr. Caplan looked uncomfortable and was about to say that Miss Rubin was misquoting him when Minnie asked:

"What does that mean?"

"Like to work wit' small wages, not to eat, not to starve."

Mr. Caplan looked round the room as in search of a way of escape. It is characteristic of the Russian Jew dubbed "kike" to be bored by the precocious wisdom of the women of his own class.

Morris Caplan was a radical; he believed in the equality of all mankind, in the abolition of wage slavery, but he was Amelia Rubin's senior by ten years, a successful real-estate dealer with a substantial bank account upon which his head rested comfortably, and so past the age and stage of extravagant protest. Amelia Rubin bored him, but she was a compatriot of his; their families on the other side were allied in the friendship that shares pots and pans and funeral expenses, so he had to see her occasionally to be able to send news of her to the other side.

Amelia, for her part, was in love with Morris Caplan and talked sagely in the hope of interesting him, while he, out of politeness, would grudgingly take up the discussions she initiated. But this evening he made it obvious that he was bored. She had been trying to convince him, regardless of whether he was already convinced or not, that the wage slave is as much of a slave as the chattel

slave. To her clumsy presentation he had, out of sheer capriciousness, answered that "Half is half and whole is whole—twice as much," his tone so frankly implying that he was not interested that Amelia had taken refuge in calling in Minnie.

Amelia's explanation made her statement no clearer to Minnie.

"I still don't know what you mean."

She spoke without an accent. Morris Caplan was interested. Though he had been ready to go a moment before, he straightened up and rested his eyes on the newcomer. She looked American-born, and her dark blue serge dress trimmed with a white collar brought out the gray of her eyes.

Morris Caplan smiled indulgently, feeling infinitely older than either of the girls.

"Amelia wants to inform me like a big piece of news that small wages makes big troubles."

Minnie burst into a merry, but not boisterous giggle. The quality of restraint in her laugh affected Morris Caplan, as it had others, with a sense of modesty in her and reserve. Sitting there blushing, she made a feminine contrast to Amelia, who had responded by a smile and a wise nod of her head, as if to say: "Indeed, this time Morris Caplan had been the sage."

"I work in the Peoples Charities, and my goodness! there you see the horrors of small wages and the greater horrors of no wages at all."

Minnie's listeners were inspired with deference. One so seldom heard words of good sense from the average American girl.

"What you workin' there by?" asked Amelia.

"I'm a stenographer," Minnie replied self-consciously,

proud to be able to say so, though after she had spoken, her words sounded in her own soul like bragging. For a moment the past of shop and store hovered close.

Morris Caplan gave her a look of generous approval and was glad of her presence. Life for him was dull. Having been all-engrossed in his business for a number of years, he had had no time for making friends, and now that he was ready for them, he found that those of his own educational and intellectual standing did not satisfy him and those of greater attainments, especially girls, made no response to his advances, while the American girls that tolerated him did so only for the "good time" his money bought. Here was a girl living in a home for poor girls who probably had as yet no assessed valuation upon herself. In his longing for comrades of superior mentality and culture, his heart leapt to the possibilities of Minnie as a friend.

The gong for the dismissal of visitors sounded. Morris Caplan rose to go.

"'Ope to mee' che again, Mees Mendel."

Minnie shook hands with him. As he walked to the door escorted by Amelia, she was not sure, looking at his stocky figure and clumsy walk and with his offensive accent sounding in her ears, whether *she* hoped to meet *him* again. While she undressed for bed, he still occupied her thoughts. Who was he? What was he? In her need for companionship she rather hoped she *would* meet him again.

XXVI

A long line of needy ones waited to be heard in the Charities employment bureau. The windows were closed

against the rain, and the thick atmosphere reeked with the sour stench of poor people. Under a siege of light-saving the room was gloomily dim.

Minnie had put the same questions about a dozen times: with thumb pointing upward, "How many children have you *over* fourteen years?" with thumb pointing downward, "How many children have you *under* fourteen years?"

The man confronting her looked like an animated skeleton to which a stubby beard only added the more gruesomeness. He dropped his eyes, in which tears had gathered, then, as if bracing himself for a high jump, said with dignity and in a low voice:

"I had six children. The four older ones died. The two left are under fourteen."

Far from becoming inured to the misery that surged through the doors of the Peoples Charities, Minnie felt the applicants' misfortunes with greater and greater keenness. A dull heartache, now constantly with her, was accentuated to a painful smart by each new account of suffering. She sat silent a while, finding it difficult, as she often had of late, to fix her mind on her work. But the record card, on which her eyes were lowered, stared a reminder. She had not yet extracted all the required information.

"What is your name, please?"

"Chayim Schlopoborsky."

She raised her eyes, her lower jaw dropped slightly, her hand remained poised in the air.

Chayim Schlopoborsky shuffled uneasily under her stare.

Minnie looked round the room, called to another girl

to take her place, and fled to an ante-room where the tears came in a rush.

"He perjured his soul by throwing us out of the cellar so that he could bring his children away from pogroms, and now they are dead!" Minnie sobbed to herself. "I suppose they went from cellar to cellar until they reached the lowest one! What an awful life!"

But she mustn't stay away too long. Drying her eyes, she returned to work. Approaching her desk, she heard her substitute's voice raised in admonition.

"Why don't you show a little more *enthusiasm*? One would think you were doing *us* a favor!"

The substitute had proposed a position at which the work was soling shoes by machine. Chayim Schlopoborsky had hesitated diffidently, wishing to say he could do better by hand, as he had never worked a machine.

"Don't you dare!" Minnie, quickly stepping forward, cried in an unnaturally suppressed voice. "He is a human being just like you. You don't know when *your* turn to stand behind this counter will come."

The substitute was too surprised to retort, but the expression of her eyes gave promise of a sequel.

It was difficult the rest of the day for Minnie to put her mind on her work. The scene left her overwrought, with flushes of lingering indignation, followed by chills of waxing nervousness as to a possibly disastrous issue to herself. It was an audacious act. Would the girl complain about her, and would she be scolded or would they do worse and discharge her? In optimistic moments she welcomed complaint as giving her the opportunity she had sometimes desired to tell the superintendent that the applicants were often abused and to suggest that unsympathetic people ought not to be employed in

the Charities. But optimistic moments were rare. She knew herself; in front of the chief she would be tonguetied, the beating of her heart would stifle her thoughts. She hated herself for her nervousness. . . . Reverting to Chayim Schlopoborsky, she wondered whether the service she had rendered him outweighed the injury she had done herself. She had acted right, she assured herself, and was glad she had spoken out. On her way home she breathed in the fresh air gratefully, as if it were a gift.

Minnie had had a few talks with Amelia Rubin. Though her philosophy was trite enough to Morris Caplan, it was not so to Minnie, who found it echoed unformulated thoughts of her own; and but for Amelia's uncouthness and almost unintelligible language, she would have given herself up freely to friendship with her. Minnie was at the flapper stage of extreme stress of the aesthetic.

This evening, however, she forgot her distaste in her eagerness to pour out her heart to someone; she approached Amelia with the easy familiarity of much more than a week's acquaintance and asked her to go out for a walk. But Amelia—she was very sorry—had arranged with another girl to attend a Peoples' Symphony Concert. Minnie was desolate. With a slight tremor, but with an attempt at a smile, she assured Amelia it was "all right," they could take a walk together some other time, and hurried back to her room.

Here she tried to read *Plays, Pleasant and Unpleasant*, but was too restless to get interested, and soon threw the book down to comb her hair. Then she went to the wash-room to remove ink stains from her fingers, came back and stood before the looking-glass trying on collars

and ribbons at the neck of her dress. Nothing gave her satisfaction. In a resolute attempt to keep the wheels of thought about her outburst and her position from revolving in her mind, she decided, as a last resort, to take a walk by herself.

On the street outside the entrance of the Home she came upon Morris Caplan.

"'Allo, Mees Mendel!" He held out his hand to Minnie.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Caplan?" she greeted him, and, assuming he had come to visit Amelia, promptly informed him where his friend had gone. She did not observe his excited manner and that his red face had taken on a few more shades of red. In her unsuspectingness that he had walked to the street of the Alpha Home in the hope of a chance meeting with her, she moved off. "Good night!"

He detained her. Where was she off to? Nowhere? Then, as it was drizzling, why not both of them return to the Alpha Home?

When they sat facing each other in the sitting-room, Minnie felt as though the heavens had opened and dropped down a gift. She had been so lonely and so in need of someone to whom to pour out her surcharged heart.

His first utterance, however, dispelled the charm. He seemed to chew his words and spit them out. How had he learned so well to pronounce just exactly wrong? Not even Minnie's Rivington Street "scholners" had spoken so badly. Or was it because her ears had then been less attuned to proper sounds, she wondered. She must have grown terribly "particular" in a short time,

and she warned herself against acquiring extravagant tastes.

What had "see" done during the week? Had "see" been happy? Every day but to-day? What then had happened to-day? Morris Caplan's eyes rested upon Minnie with a sort of elderly-paternal kindness, which went to her heart and made her feel like a little child.

She had had trouble that day at the Charities, she told him. He asked for details, and she, less anxious to resist than to confide, gave him an account of her championship of Chayim Schlopoborsky, without, however, mentioning her prior acquaintance with the cobbler.

As Morris Caplan listened, while leisurely surveying her well-fitting, becoming black skirt and dainty blouse and taking in the charm of her eyes, which suggested a gray sky, and the refinement of her enunciation, he felt his heart warm toward her. It brought back his own enthusiastic youth when, precisely as she, he had grown heated over the right and the wrong of things. Now he was more mature, more sedate, more settled down, so to speak, into the world's ways, but his spirit responded with sad envy and appreciation. Her young mind seemed to spread its wings and be soaring. This girl, he felt, had the attractiveness of simplicity and innocence of her own attractiveness. His demeanor changed from the condescending paternal to that of the friendly listener and adviser.

He was sure she would not lose her position, but if she were to, he could use a smart girl like her in his own office. She had been quite right to take issue with the substitute; no human being had the right to abuse another. Indeed, he was glad to have learned of the injustice; he would

withdraw his own annual contribution to the Peoples Charities.

The last was said with the distinct object of making an impression upon Minnie, who, however, did not respond by so much as the quiver of an eyelash; which only increased Morris Caplan's respect for Minnie Mendel. Here was a twentieth-century American girl who had no scent for money. In his experience American girls condescended to be in his company in the expectation of theater treats, taxi rides, and boxes of candy, looking upon him, to his keen consciousness and hurt, as a "kike," because of his accent, disregarding of his real qualities of heart and soul. This little American girl was the first one with whom, in the longest while, he had had a sensible talk.

The dismissal gong rang far too soon for Morris Caplan. On rising he ventured the hope that she would let him visit her again. Minnie also was sorry the evening had come to an end. It was flattering that a man so much older than she listened to her so interestedly. On the way to her room she quivered with a feeling akin to a child's excitement in a new toy.

XXVII

The tale of Minnie's "jumping on" the substitute was spread by that young person in various forms of exaggeration among the others of her clan, whose dander went up sympathetically at "the audacity of her," "the cheek of her," "the nerve of her." She had better look out and not try any such tricks on them. However, no charges were brought, and for many weeks things went along in their uninterrupted drab way.

The perplexing problem of poverty never left Minnie's mind. How could a world of presumably good people tolerate such wretchedness in their midst? Why did not those with a surplus hand it over promiscuously to those with nothing? And if the surplus was not handed over, then why did not those deprived of the means of living rebel? Why, instead of rebelling, did they come daily and beg for alms? It seemed so perfectly simple and easy to Minnie for the poor to get together and resolve to abolish their poverty.

Amelia Rubin, with whom she discussed these things, agreed with her, but her agreement was tainted by a bitter cynicism with which Minnie was not yet ripe enough to cope. For refuge she fled to fun-making.

When Amelia was sure that God was "invented" to keep folks in the dark so that all sorts of vile "tricks" could be perpetrated upon them while kept by their belief in jelly-fish submission and subordination, Minnie was sure that there *was* a God, but since there was mankind, *too*, and in the majority at that, men ruled things in their own way and had made such a mess of it that He had retired in confusion, so that while some simple people still continued to pray to Him and to worship Him, He was really every moment eloquently proclaiming through our very human miseries that His power had been deposed. But if Amelia, in the way of young cynics, was so touched by a lovely sky, by a sunset, by the chirping of a sparrow that she sighed and soliloquized that maybe, after all, there *was* a God, Minnie would look up to heaven and exclaim: "God in heaven, save this girl from such foolishness!" or "You are as fickle as God's image has a right to be, so I'm not blaming you."

Minnie took the same refuge from Morris Caplan's

atrocious language. After he had called four or five times again and she had, upon Amelia's urgent invitation, always joined them, she refused the next time. Though his one visit alone with her, in the particularly dependent mood in which she had been that evening, had given her pleasure, his subsequent visits had been boresome. The conversations, with Amelia at the helm, had seemed always to pull the wrong way.

One evening he called when Amelia was out. Minnie went down wondering who could possibly have asked to see Miss Mendel. At sight of Morris Caplan she was appalled. But he came forward smiling so broadly and radiating so much cordiality as he said, "'Allo, Mees Mendel," that she felt her heart warm to him with affection. Pretty soon she was saying with a twinkle:

"Why do you spoil perfectly good silence? Silence grates much less on the ear than 'dets is,' 'enyhull,' 'yeh, 'partickala.' If you want to speak, why don't you learn how? And why do you call me '*mees*'?*" What did I ever do to you to be called '*mees*'?"

"Go on," said Morris Caplan, "laugh yourself fat!" As if to assure himself that she needed the additional flesh, he took hold of her arm, laughing with her as she wriggled out of his grasp.

In two weeks' time Morris Caplan, real estate dealer, whose business policy it was never to take "no" for an answer, had wheedled Miss Mendel into giving him lessons in English.

XXVIII

Life for over a year proceeded in the same tenor—work, eat, sleep, giving Morris Caplan lessons, walks

* *Mees* is the Yiddish for "ugly."

with him, walks with Amelia—until one day Ida, acting as Sarah's emissary, came with Beckie to bring Minnie the news that Jacob was going to graduate from college and wanted her to attend the exercises.

Minnie was touched. After all, they did not look on her as an outsider; she was welcome to the family circle. To keep back the tears that would come if she answered directly, she cast about for something else to say.

"Is Abie Ratkin going to graduate, too?"

Ida, though she resentfully attributed to Minnie's indifference this switching off from the matter of family interest, answered politely enough:

"He graduated last year. He skipped a term. He's teaching already. Jacob got extra tickets and invited Abie, and you can sit with him. We all thought"—here she got in her sting—"you'd feel contaminated if you sat with us."

Minnie grew hot.

"Tell Jacob," she said, lowering her head to hide the twitching of her face, "I congratulate him."

"Thank God!" cried Ida in exaggerated relief, as though Minnie had accepted the invitation in so many words. "Mama lived in mortal terror of your turning up your nose." She laughed disagreeably.

A week later, Minnie, dressed in clothes all new except for her shoes and gloves (no working-girl is ever clad in absolute harmonious newness) with a two-dollar-and-sixty-five-cent volume of Shakespeare's complete works under her arm, started off for Carnegie Hall.

"My goodness," she kept saying to herself, "I've got a brother a college graduate!" She hugged "college graduate" proudly.

On an empty cross street, which she chose in order to make better speed, she was roused out of herself by a caterwauling, which proceeded from a ragged little urchin down whose muddy countenance the tears were making pathways. Minnie investigated. The little one was lost and had no idea of his parentage or place of habitation. There was nothing to do but to take him by the hand and lead him, no, drag him—oh, how the child crept!—to the nearest station-house.

* * * * *

At half-past seven there were already gathered in Carnegie Hall the zealous relatives of graduates, who preferred to wait an hour to being one moment late. There was subdued whispering, handshaking and smiles of heaven itself on the wrinkled faces of old-fashioned mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles; and the eyes of the younger generation shone with peace on earth, good will to men. Flitting figures of young men garbed in the graduation black were followed with loving exclamations, "That's my son!" "That's my brother!" and were scrutinized with wonderment and reverence.

Presently there came toiling up the stairs a silent group, Sarah, Leopold, Ida, Beckie. Sarah's heart was heavy. Jacob, in his relentless unforgivingness, had not extended a personal invitation to Leopold, who had been offended and at the last moment had refused to attend the exercises.

Sarah's heart writhed. She had felt intuitively it would be so. By this time in her life she had reached the conclusion that she was destined never to experience unadulterated happiness. Her boy was to be graduated from college! An achievement for poor people. An honor, a glory, to witness a son proclaimed a gentleman

learned in the ways of great things. The occasion, which ought to be one of pure joy, must be marred for her; she had felt it; she had known that Jacob's failure to invite his stepfather personally would mean Leopold's refusal to attend. That he had refrained from protesting until the last moment had only meant a period of miserable anticipation. Sarah was hurt, angered. Nevertheless, subduing her voice, she reasoned pleasantly with her husband that Jacob was self-conscious about things like reconciliations, and it was a little omission which Leopold ought not to mind. "Jacob," she concluded, "did not even send an invitation to Minnie. I myself sent the invitation by Ida and Beckie."

But Leopold was not to be argued out of his grievance; Jacob could graduate without his presence just as well, he said. Further persuasion only increased the tension. Sarah's heightened color, the stubborn quiet of the two girls, Leopold's subdued but impassioned voice, charged the atmosphere as with an explosive.

When it was high time to leave, Sarah began to cry and to lament her never-ending hard lot. Bad enough that her children were parted and scattered and her heart was always torn in a thousand pieces—Leopold had not the right on this special occasion of a lifetime to make her miserable and let her feel how divided her life was; for without Leopold she was not willing to go to the exercises, and to absent herself from her boy's graduation would break her heart.

Leopold gave evidence of relenting by taking off his everyday necktie and rummaging in his bureau drawer for a Sunday one. In silence, then, Sarah and the girls made ready; in silence all four traveled to the graduation hall, and in silence climbed the stairs to the gallery, each

with mingled emotions of the gladness of the occasion and the sadness of their unnatural family life.

As soon as they were seated, Sarah asked Ida to point out Minnie's seat. The eyes of the other three followed Ida's index finger. The seat was empty. When the hall began to fill up and from the stirring on the platform it seemed that the exercises would soon begin, Sarah glanced anxiously toward Minnie's seat and then toward the entrance. Would it be Minnie that was going to absent herself? How heartaches never ended for her! Leopold discerned Sarah's misery and genuinely regretted the distress he himself had caused her.

A young man was about to enter the row of Minnie's seat. Abie Ratkin? They all peered. Yes, it was Abie Ratkin. Ida, catching his eye, beckoned to him. At the same moment Jacob appeared, hot, hurried, excited.

"God mine!" Sarah exclaimed inwardly, "will he greet his uncle?"

Jacob, whose heart must have been reached by his mother's unspoken cry, turned to Leopold and clumsily shook hands with him. Leopold, touched, congratulated him. Sarah, out of gratitude, rose slightly from her seat, Jacob bent down, and they kissed. Then the girl also kissed their brother, and Abraham Ratkin congratulated him.

Jacob, embarrassed and eager to hide his embarrassment, said he had stolen away to see them only for a minute, and left. Ida called after him that they would all meet on the street after the exercises.

Abraham lingered to ask for Minnie. Beckie, with a knowing, teasing twinkle, told him Minnie was coming and was even going to sit beside him; embarrassed, he made a mocking bow in appreciation of the courtesy. Sarah, whose eyes were misted over with anxiety about

Minnie, acknowledged the fun with a melancholy smile, and as soon as Abraham left for his seat, sent another furtive glance toward the entrance. Would Minnie come?

"Makes me sick," Ida muttered, "always spoils everything."

A voice called for order, everybody was seated, and a solemn hush fell upon the place. The graduates began to assemble on the platform; there was music, coughing, scattering sneezes and general adjustment. Then one could have heard a pin drop.

Sarah looked anxiously at Minnie's still vacant seat.

A gray-haired gentleman in a brief preliminary speech introduced another elderly gentleman, who rose lumberingly and crossed to the front of the platform with dignified professorial mien. In a deep, solemn voice he laid before the audience the history of the nation's policy of wonderful democracy, which gave to one and all equal opportunity to reach the heights of education, the heights of attainment in every field, the heights of glory. He repeated points he wished especially to impress, and solemnly, adjuringly, pleaded for due appreciation of the benefits conferred by the College of the City of New York.

The speech brought tears to the eyes of parents who, listening, understood not a word, since the language was not their language. But what else could the man be saying than that the particular boy of the particular parent be ever grateful, ever appreciative of the sacrifices entailed in sending him through college? Who but a parent would have made such sacrifices? Who but a parent would have slaved and stinted himself so all the years? A parent's love was holy; a parent's life hard.

A pause and a storm of applause.

Sarah's misted eyes again traveled to the door. At that moment Minnie, hot and flurried, entered. As by Fate decreed, she met her mother's gaze in all that throng of people.

Sarah's heart gave a great leap, and the color left her face and lips, while Minnie grew dizzy and felt herself turn pale.

Ida, who succeeded in drawing Minnie's eyes to her, shrugged her shoulders and pursed her lips as if to ask what good excuse Minnie could give for being late on such an occasion. Minnie understood and hurriedly sought her seat. The momentary unhappiness tugging at her heart gave way to pleasure at meeting Abie, who smiled self-consciously, quite overcome by the great change in her. "A regular lady" was his summing up.

The stage proceedings had no meaning to Sarah now. Her eyes devoured her prodigal daughter, and her ears could listen only to the words of her own soul, "How she has grown! Only yesterday she was a teething baby. She looks just as I used to look when I was a young girl—the same gray eyes—the same features. If only she will not have my black luck!"

Hand-clapping woke her as from out of a dream.

During a short intermission, occasioned by some hitch in the proceedings, Beckie left her seat to ask Minnie what had made her late. Minnie explained. *Well*, at such a time to bother to take a strange child to a station-house! Even Beckie could not condone Minnie's behavior. Did Abraham think Minnie had done right? Abraham evaded Beckie's pretty eyes. This display in Minnie of altruism rather appealed to him, though under the circumstances he could not quite approve of it, and it occurred to him that the Mendels had forever a bone

of contention, if not over a big thing then over a trifle. He said nothing. Minnie felt guilty.

The next number began.

Minnie's eyes followed Beckie's departing figure and, traveling a bit too far, again encountered her mother's. Sarah was gray at the temples, her lips were parched, she looked tired, haggard, harassed. A pang of regret from a feeling that she was partly to blame smote Minnie's heart. She moved in her seat to dispel the feeling and urged upon herself that this was a happy occasion when she ought not to let anything disturb her.

A small, narrow-shouldered young man, his face flushing painfully, his whole manner showing he was horribly nervous, stepped forward on the stage, cleared his throat in an effort to bring notes of manliness into a naturally piping voice, and proclaimed to the accompaniment of seesaw gestures that:

"Our duty to the city and the college is clear. For years my fellow-classmates and I have received the continuous care of our alma mater. And now we are alumni. All that these halls of learning can give us we have received. All the attention of our patient instructors has been lavished upon us. The wisdom of the past and present has been absorbed by us. As loyal graduates of the college we will always think with pride and tenderness of our years spent at the college and our obligation to our friends at the college."

Minnie's mind wandered. The whole of the past had so long been sunk below her horizon that she had almost outlived it and hardly ever recalled that she had a mother, and a home if she chose to go to it. Nor did Abie Ratkin enter her thoughts often enough for her to feel he was a part of her past. And here he was—here was her mother! The past was a part of one. It was like turning

round and suddenly confronting your own shadow. Even the Helina Heimath was out of her mind already. For all the plans she had made, when she was an inmate, to visit the place after she had left, she had never gone there again. She seemed to have stepped into another world. Would something come up to remind her that that charity, that pauperism, was part of her, too? A shudder went through her. . . . She glanced sidewise at Abraham. He was still short, shorter than she—his head was a trifle lower than hers. His nose was still curved, his hair scanty, his eyes small, like the eyes of a Japanese, and he still wore glasses and still looked intellectual, as if he spent long hours over books; and his face still wore a benevolent expression—the ideal schoolmaster's face. Though Minnie was quite sure that he was very learned, she wondered for some reason whether life itself reached him as poignantly as it did her and whether he understood it. Could he, for instance, understand what was making her heart ache now, when she saw her mother grayed and felt she herself had deliberately contributed to the grayness and would continue to do so? Could he understand her unhappiness because there was poverty in the world, her resentment because nothing but the mere physical opportunity differentiated the "ladies" who visited the Helina Heimath from the patients they patronized? No, she did not think he could understand all that. He seemed to have a heart of peace and an understanding to match.

Applause again. Minnie was roused. She sighed.

"Why that sigh?"

"Oh, I'm just thinking."

Abraham smiled an embarrassed smile and moved self-consciously in his seat. He cleared his throat.

"Thinking? Do you do that?"

She slewed her eyes round at him, and his breath was cut short. If her eyes had been beautiful the last time he had seen her the Saturday afternoon when she was alone and had plied him with ten thousand questions they were more than beautiful now. They were like two gray clouds of endless depth, with tales and tales to tell. He looked away.

"Yes, I *do* think. Why, does it surprise you?"

She seemed displeased. With a fluttering droop of eyelids and a paternal kindliness in voice and manner, he said he was only joking; of course she thought; anyone could see she did; in fact, she seemed to be quite a thinker; some day soon she would have to tell him everything she thought about.

She felt reduced to a mite of a girl and was silenced, hesitating between even greater displeasure and the satisfaction that seems to be woman's more normal reaction to such treatment at the hands and tongue of man.

There were a few other numbers, then came Jacob, valedictorian. The hearts of all his family pounded with pride and excitement as he moved to the front of the platform. Minnie threw a cutting glance at a man behind her who coughed irritatingly. Jacob cleared his throat. The family leaned forward in their seats and strained every nerve to listen. In a deep voice, with attendant dignity, he began:

"We have traced the course of history and evolution through the long rolling centuries, which have each made their special contribution toward carrying the world from primeval barbarism to the present era of culture and civilization. We have examined the attitude of rich and poor alike, of the plutocrat, who regards the whole world as an attractive prey, and of the humble laborer, who adds to the world's assets.

"And can we hesitate as to what cause to champion, whose battle to fight? Never. We should be craven in our highest duties to mankind if we did not stand for the future against the past, for the toiler against the parasite."

That was all Minnie heard. Her heart pounded and deafened her. He had said something about siding with the poor as against the rich, something about a past of the one and a future of the other. It was not clear to her, but she felt a kinship with him. "Jacob, too! Jacob, too!" she kept saying to herself happily, the blood running warm through her veins. Oh, if only she could speak to him!

Another outburst of applause.

Sarah wept.

Leopold was pale. His skin seemed suddenly to have shrivelled; a subtle sense of guilt had stolen upon his heart. Had he actually stood between this mother and that son—blood of each other's blood, flesh of each other's flesh? He was in superstitious fear of judgment even though something deep in his being cried that he had *not* meant to usurp the place of this mother's children. He gave Sarah a sad look. She met it and placed her hand in his; together they sighed.

The exercises closed. Some of the audience loitered for one more look upon a holy graduate. Most of them made for the exits.

XXIX

Ida and Beckie, who had got separated in the crowd from Sarah and Leopold, reached the street ahead of them and joined Minnie and Abraham. The four waited together.

Sarah, slowly following the crowd, wondered with a heavy heart whether Minnie would seek a reconciliation. Leopold, conscious of the mother's misery, breathed a silent prayer that Minnie would for once forget to be stubborn.

Minnie cast nervous glances at the crowd emerging from the doorway. She hoped fervently that Jacob would arrive before Sarah and Leopold, so that she could give him the volume of Shakespeare, congratulate him, ask him to come to see her, and get away. Though she did not feel unforgiving, she shrank from meeting her mother and stepfather. The separation had seemed so definitely established in her mind as a lasting one that the thought of a reconciliation filled her with shame, as if it would be maudlin and unwholesome.

Leopold and Sarah appeared in the doorway.

Minnie quickly handed the volume of Shakespeare to Beckie, asked her to give it to Jacob with her congratulations, and saying good-by hurriedly left.

Abraham, looking from her to Ida and Beckie, quickly took in the situation and dashed after her.

Sarah and Leopold saw what had taken place. With bowed heads they crossed over to Ida and Beckie, and the four stood a silent group until Jacob appeared, then they walked away, dully, heavily.

When they reached the corner at which Jacob turned his independent way, Sarah kissed him, and until they reached home she held her handkerchief steadily to her eyes.

XXX

Abraham had learned from Jacob, with whom he associated at college, that Sarah had married again and that

he had left home, but not that Minnie had left home, too.

He and Minnie walked side by side for some time without talking. Minnie was under too great stress to speak, and Abraham sensed it. Finally he ventured to ask where she lived. She told him. Silence fell between them again. Then Abraham, deciding he ought to divert her mind from her unhappiness, said:

"Well, now, tell me everything you think about. You promised."

"Do you think I think so little that I can tell you all I think at once?"

He saw she was annoyed, and he was sorry.

"No," he said jokingly, adopting a light tone as the best remedial measure, "I suppose your wisdom is not so easily conveyed. Is that a subtle invitation to me to come to see you?"

She smiled, and it crossed her mind that it *would* be nice to have him visit her. She was grateful he had suggested it. She softened, and in her changed mood repented her brutal avoidance of her mother, and was caught by an impulse to hurry back. But the months when she lay ill and neglected at the Helina Heimath rose to her mind. Raising her head with a little jerk as if to shut out of sight the bitter picture and with a stiffening of her whole frame, she started conversation.

"Did you understand what Jacob said?"

The question touched the schoolmaster's pride. Abraham cleared his throat and straightened his shoulders.

Why, yes. Jacob, like himself, was a Socialist.

"What is a Socialist?" She had never got a clear idea of Socialism from Amelia, and thought here was her chance.

Abraham cleared his throat again.

"A Socialist is one who believes in the social ownership of all the means of production; in other words, the ownership by the government of all public utilities; the mines, for example, the mills, the factories, the railroads, the telegraphs, and so on."

As Minnie did not understand the significance or any of the implications of such ownership, she ventured no comment or further questions. She felt disappointed. Abraham, however, eager to instruct, most in his element when doing so, continued:

"Of course, from social ownership of social utilities, would result the elimination of rent, interest, and profit, which would do away with the exploitation of one human being by another."

Minnie was awed into respect. Abraham's learning reduced her to humility. A wave of bitterness rose within her against her mother, Leopold Pollack and the whole world that she had not had the opportunity of going through high school and college. She walked beside Abraham in unhappy silence. Then she recollected Morris Caplan's and Amelia Rubin's idealization of her as a paragon of knowledge, and the weight on her heart lightened somewhat. Yet throughout the rest of the evening, she was depressed by a sense of inferiority.

At the door of the Alpha Home, Abraham asked whether he might come again. In her surprise she hesitated in saying yes.

"Won't you be glad to see me?" he questioned, holding her hand in a goodnight shake.

"Yes." She lowered her eyes.

He would come the following Sunday then.

Minnie ran into the house and up to her room aquiver

with the excitement of the evening's experiences. As she stood in front of the looking glass combing her hair, her mind was a medley. Her mother was gray already! She had looked unhappy and as if she were begging for some sign of recognition from Minnie. How had she had the heart to run away? She had not seen Jacob at all! What an odd evening to come in upon all the recent serene ones. Life never went smoothly two minutes at a time. How she would love to talk to Jacob! Oh, but if his ideas of rich and poor had no more meaning for her than what Abie had said, what good were they? She did not understand it all anyway—never would. . . . Abie would come again. That meant another friend maybe. She wouldn't be so lonely. Morris Caplan and Amelia Rubin, after all, weren't altogether her sort. From them she never learned anything. But then Abie knew *too* much for her. If he spoke above her head, what good was it? 'Oh, nothing ever was just right. . . . Leopold looked older, troubled. Did they really care a rap about her? Then why hadn't they run after her, followed her anyway? Why had mama never come to see her at the Helina Heimath? She had been sick—so sick. No real mother would have done such a thing. But maybe—mama was getting older—maybe she would die! Minnie shuddered and hastily tumbled into bed to drown all in sleep.

XXXI

On Sunday afternoon Minnie, her hair arranged as becomingly as she could get it, the collar of her blue serge dress spotless, was sitting in her small, neat room waiting for the hall telephone of her floor to ring to an-

nounce her visitor. Her mind *would* wander from *The Doll's House*, and though she told herself over and over that it was foolish to be nervous, it was only Abie Ratkin who was coming, yet her heart pounded and her cheeks burned, and every little while, though quite convinced that she looked well and even pretty, she rose and examined herself in the looking-glass, putting almost single hairs in place. Would Abraham guess she was so nervous, she wondered. She rubbed her dank hands so that they should not betray her when she shook hands with him.

But Abraham's own hands were moist, from the very same cause, and he noticed nothing. He, too, had told himself it was only Minnie Mendel he was going to visit while his heart pounded disproportionately with the importance of the occasion. When she moved toward him gracefully in the waiting-room, smiling and pretty, he found himself at a loss what to say. To gain time he glanced over his shoulder, pretending he had heard the sound of something drop.

Did she wish to stay in or take a walk? She thought they might stay in a while and then take a walk. They seated themselves. Each seemed to go through a moment of adjustment, as if their souls were smoothing out wrinkles. Minnie, to whom his embarrassment was obvious, wondered, provoked with herself, whether she, too, was revealing her nervousness. She simply must not. So she took herself in hand and coolly began to talk.

How was his mother? His sisters? Had they graduated? Yes? A pang of jealousy smote her, and she looked away not to betray herself, suppressed a little sigh, and went on. Had he got home all right the night of Jacob's graduation?

Abraham several times changed his position on his chair and cleared his throat, bringing his hand up awkwardly to his mouth. He wished they were out walking. The night of the graduation exercises, when they had come home together, he had not been so deucedly self-conscious. He felt it was absurd to allow merely Minnie Mendel to unbalance him so; even the professors at college had never had the power to unnerve him. Finally he brought out the suggestion that they go out walking. Minnie acquiesced readily, jumped up to go and get her hat, and turned toward the door.

There stood Morris Caplan, ruddy-cheeked, smiling broadly, his heavy gold watch chain dangling. The sight of him was welcome to Minnie, who hailed him genially, as one does an old acquaintance, and promptly fell into a vivacious tone. She introduced him as her protégé, who was much nicer, she said, than his language would lead one to suspect. While she was never sure that her own philosophy was right, she was always sure that his was wrong, and though he was good enough to associate with her, a mere Alpha Home working-girl, he was already a remarkably successful real estate dealer with the ambition to house the vast majority of the population of the United States as soon as ever he graduated from her college.

Abraham, who had not suspected that Minnie could, as he put it to himself, "bubble" like that, was greatly drawn to her. His own self-consciousness departed, and a mountain of preliminaries was removed to a free approach to the little Minnie of Henry Street. He gave her a broad smile, while a soft feeling like the light of dawn crept into his heart. He remembered "Fights," the "rock," the bundle of refuse, the Essex Market Court. . . .

He was startled out of his reverie by hearing Minnie say:

"Mr. Ratkin and I are going out for a walk. Won't you and Amelia join us, Mr. Caplan?" Abraham, to his own surprise, felt resentful. On the street they soon paired off, and he had the chance to ask:

"Who are these people?" He had exchanged enough words with Amelia to pigeonhole her "a foreign-born shop-girl." No friends for Minnie, he thought.

"Amelia lives in the Home, and she's the only sensible girl I've met yet beside Ella Liebman, and Miss Liebman is busy with her own friends."

It flashed through Abraham's mind that his sisters would supply a need of Minnie's.

"Do you spend Sundays with them? I mean, are they your *friends*?"

"They are."

Abraham was at a loss as to what to make of such incongruous matchings. His sisters were high-school girls and had high-school friends; he himself was a college man with college friends. An American girl, intelligent, quick-witted, to have a "kike" and a shop-girl as friends! It was out of the regular. He hoped Minnie did not have an addiction for the irregular, the odd—a particularly objectionable trait in a girl; some of his college mates had said so. She wasn't like his sisters, that was certain. There was an airiness about her, a sort of effervescence, a kind of fanciness. Perhaps it was an instability. He thought of her lateness at Jacob's graduation, which, for the reason she had given, he had at the time condoned; but perhaps such unusual behavior was characteristic of her. He was concerned and felt impelled to influence her to sobriety. Through a linking

of ideas he now conjectured as to the reasons that had made her leave home. If the other two girls had stayed at home, the stepfather could not be an altogether impossible person. And how she had darted away on seeing her mother. How unnatural. Abraham made up his mind to draw Minnie out.

But Minnie, of her own accord, went on talking about Mr. Caplan and Amelia. While she liked them, she said, they did not think as she did. In a way they did, in a way they didn't. Did Abraham understand?

Abraham did understand, and it was just what he had thought. He was glad she felt that way and was now convinced that he had been correct in supposing that she and his sisters ought to be friends. Promptly he formulated a program in his mind: he would take Minnie to visit them, would come to see her often, would help her choose the right books to read—guide her—lead her—form her. His schoolmaster's soul was seeking exercise.

XXXII

When he had so efficiently planned a regimen for Minnie, it provoked Abraham that even after his regular Sunday visits had continued for months she still retained her foreign-born friends. He could not, of course, tell her in so many words that she should drop them, but he felt it ought to have occurred to her naturally as the result of his guiding, and he pondered what method to pursue to make her see the right light. One Sunday afternoon when they were out walking together, he said:

"Don't you think if you did not spend so much time teaching Mr. Caplan you would have more time to read?"

Abraham had mapped out a course of reading, which included Gronlund's *Coöperative Commonwealth*, to clear up Minnie's muddled sentimental notions about social wrongs, Emerson's essays for her general good, and Martin's *Human Body* to teach her hygiene, as her frequent paleness and tiredness made it obvious that she needed to know something about the care of the body. It was hard for her to plunge into this bony intellectuality from the live, pulsating world of Bernard Shaw, Ibsen, Tolstoi. So, half shyly, half complainingly, she had told him two or three times that the stuff was too dry, too hard. He objected, in the first place, to the terminology "stuff," and it irritated him, besides, that she lacked docility. No one asks a child whether it does or does not want castor oil. The dose is simply administered, with a firm, even if tender hand. With the characteristic fluttering droop of his lids, he turned his head away in impatience, then with gentle firmness administered the necessary "Oh, now, come, come, settle down to it," which disarmed her as to speech but not as to her intentions, since she was quite convinced that the "stuff" he wanted her to read had no power to illuminate her feelings. Abraham failed to take into consideration that with some people reason follows feeling as an offspring, and each has to go through its regular process of development else both thought and feeling remain forever aborted.

"I have enough time," she replied, lowering her eyes, somewhat ashamed that she could not muster the inclination for the intellectuality to which Abraham aspired for her, "but really, Abraham, I don't find it interesting. It's so dry." She gave a deprecatory smile and a questioning lift of her brows. "Maybe I'm stupid," she added as if by the admission to gain exemption and absolution.

Her girlish manner attracted him, but her noncompliance was disappointing and displeasing. He was silent from impotence, wishing he could seat her beside him at a table and lead her step by step along the printed pages of the books he had recommended through rational processes of thinking to absolute knowledge. Finally he said:

"I suppose you think you know enough; that if, for example, you get angry at poverty, you've found a solution, and if you are puzzled as to the existence of a God you have the whole of philosophy at your fingers' tips, and if you take a physic you know how to keep well."

The false charge hurt. Minnie flushed and replied with spirit:

"I don't see how anybody can be surer that there is or there is not a God than I. He has not revealed Himself to others any more than He has to me. And I think poverty exists because people are selfish and grab. I imagine when people develop morally, then the problem will solve itself."

"You seem to be wiser than Plato and Aristotle and Socrates and Karl Marx all rolled into one." Abraham smiled.

They happened just then to be making a street-crossing, and a wagon dashing from around a corner at great speed bore right down on Minnie. She was in imminent danger. For a single instant Abraham stood petrified, then grabbed her arm and pulled her back on the pavement, and stood pale and panting for breath. Minnie laughed at the comical picture he presented.

In that single moment of her danger there swept upon Abraham with almost hurricane force the knowledge of the extent to which he depended upon Minnie for his in-

terest in life. But she seemed so unreasonably indifferent as to whether or not she were run over that he could have shaken her.

Perhaps it was just because she made it difficult for him to feel secure in his ruling power that she seemed so necessary to him. Prodigal children are said to be especially dear to their parents, and the schoolmaster's soul is essentially paternal.

XXXIII

Abraham's visit left Minnie worn out, and she lay down on her bed to rest and think.

Beside his course of reading he had prescribed friendship with his sisters. "In the three times that he's taken me to see them," she told herself, "I have been drawn to them less each time. They're so everydaylike, so tame! I don't see why he insists upon my doing things I don't want to do." Yet hand in hand with her resentment went equal displeasure with herself for not being able to respond to Abraham's guidance. "I used to be so lonely and now he comes every Sunday. I ought to be very grateful." Even at this urgency no gratitude sprang up in her heart, and she sank into dejection, into a feeling of heaviness, of being weighted down—the state, she now realized, in which Abraham invariably left her. Their talks never went smoothly. If she spoke hotly about the vast amount of poverty in the world and about the rich thinking they made it up to the poor by doling out charity, he called her a sentimentalist, told her she was ranting, and would do better to read on economics and socialism and arrive at a sane, level-headed understanding of what the social evils were and what would eradicate them. If she told him of her differences with employees

at the Charities, who were overbearing with applicants, he said she was hot-headed, as proved by her to-dos with her stepfather.

"I don't mean to hurt you, Minnie," he would add when she looked hurt. "I am telling you only because I am interested in you. I wouldn't take the trouble otherwise."

Lying on her bed thinking over these incidents of Abraham's visits, Minnie felt that actually Abraham *did* mean it all for her good, and she wished she could work up enthusiasm for his erudite attitude toward life and things.

She rose and examined herself in the small, rectangular mirror screwed to the top of the chiffonière. She was pretty, there was no denying it. "My eyes are beautiful. Everybody says so." She smiled to her image, which, however, did not have consolation to offer for long. "Oh, goodness, I'm sick of this monotony. Every day it's going to work and Amelia Rubin or Morris Caplan or Abraham Ratkin. In novels there are all kinds of experiences. Real life's not like that at all." She leaned closer to the glass and smoothed her hair away from her forehead. "I suppose if I had a home and didn't go out working and went about in society, I'd be having lovers and proposals of marriage and evening dresses and everything." A voice whispered to her: "Be glad you're not bedridden in the Helina Heimath." She shuddered and urged a pious mood upon herself. "I've lots to be grateful for. I can work and I'm not getting charity." But her heart remained filled with longing, with restlessness, and yearning.

Dispiritedly she went about making ready for supper. In the evening she expected her sisters, who would, for the first time, meet Morris Caplan, who was coming, not

for an English lesson, but for a social call upon her and Amelia.

Two hours later Ida was whispering disdainfully in Minnie's ear:

"Such a kike! Can't you find better friends?"

Minnie flushed. She felt ashamed. Why did she "keep friends" with Morris Caplan? He *was* a kike. That was the way Abraham must feel about him, too. But where was one to choose friends? What a nasty accent Morris Caplan still had. She would make him take lessons from someone else. She ought certainly to appreciate Abraham Ratkin, who was a college graduate. Yet her heart would not echo the admonition; she could feel no warmth for Abraham even with his superior virtues. She yearned for others—for a different kind of friends, such as she could talk to without restraint, without the fear of being found fault with, or of not being understood.

The rest of the evening she was so persistently silent that her companions remarked on it and made good-natured attempts to liven her up. When Morris Caplan took leave, she refused to shake hands. It was her first experience of a repugnance at being touched. The feeling stayed with her until her eyes closed in sleep.

The next morning she awoke with a vast emptiness in her heart. She wished she could hide her head under the covers and never get up.

"Don't grumble," she fought against the feeling as she dressed, "you're better off than you ever thought you'd be. What if you'd have remained a shop-girl? You know shorthand, *shorthand*, what the doctor friend of your youth"—she smiled—"and every other office manager required. You're working in an office, in an office! Think of it!"

Throughout the day the same restless dissatisfaction continued. Her work seemed meaningless, everything vapid, all about her hopeless. She felt like venting anger on someone. The talking and occasional giggling at the other desks annoyed her more than usually; and once, when a particularly loud burst of laughter went up, she had to grit her teeth. Her substitute of the Chayim Schlopoborsky episode was showing a postal card received from an applicant. One of the group handed the card to Minnie.

"Plez ladi," it ran, "kom kwik the boyler bust it's 2 get dronded her and mi wif had a babi."

Before Minnie knew it, she was denouncing the girls hotly as heartless and disrespectful of the grief the card conveyed. They were flunkies, she told them, who did not see that there was no difference between the persons who applied for charity and the persons who supported the Charities. If anything, those who came for charity had been cheated, and those who bestowed charity had been the cheaters.

When she ended, all out of breath and exhausted, she realized she had been foolish. Some of the girls looked frightened as though they were menaced by an insane person; others declared they had never seen or heard or met with such audacity, such impertinence, such impudence! The offended substitute vowed she would stand it no longer; Minnie had been "too fresh anyway" too often; she would bring charges against her.

XXXIV

"I'm blue, Amelia, take a walk with me."

Minnie had knocked on Amelia's door and, receiving

no answer, had entered unceremoniously; and Amelia, who had flung herself, tired out, on her bed for a nap, was awakened with a start by the sound of Minnie flopping into the wooden rocking-chair.

"Gee, you scart me to deat'!"

"You'll never learn to say 'death' until you've had the experience, I suppose."

Amelia laughed an unrestrained laugh.

"Oh, come on, stop. Get your hat on," said Minnie in a tone of annoyance.

Amelia, who had used up her strength laughing, replied:

"Honest, I kent go. I hev no strang left."

Minnie, jumping up from her seat, cried in more than mock seriousness:

"Upon my word, Amelia, you and Morris Caplan drive me wild with your lingo. I can't think of a sin I've committed to deserve the punishment of having to listen to you."

Amelia laughed again, but warned Minnie she was not to say anything against Morris Caplan.

Was Amelia in love with him maybe?

What did Minnie care? Amelia dropped her eyes and turned away so abruptly that Minnie was put on a hitherto unsuspected scent.

On the street there was silence between the girls for some time, Amelia having perceived Minnie's nervousness and realizing that her accent actually did grate upon her. Minnie was the first to speak.

"I've got something to tell you."

Amelia's heart gave a leap. Perhaps Morris Caplan, who clearly was attracted to Minnie, had proposed to her. For a moment the world was a great empty place to

Amelia, then loyalty to her friend asserted itself above alarm on her own account. She smiled a sickly smile, and from between pale lips came the query:

"Did Morris Caplan propose to you?"

"Why, *no!*"

So Amelia *was* in love with Morris Caplan and was jealous! Goodness, all the months that Minnie had been giving him lessons she must have been hurting Amelia! She remembered Abraham's advice to terminate the lessons. Amelia, too, would probably have been glad. Minnie saw a dull, depressing vista ahead of empty evenings without calls or lessons. It was hard. And Amelia was actually in love—in love as in books. She, Minnie, would like to be in love, too; her life was so horribly dull and empty. But with whom? Abraham? She shrank within herself. Then, as if by stealth, her thoughts touched Morris Caplan but instantly withdrew in shame.

Amelia roused her by saying:

"I guess you guess."

"Yes."

They walked on in silence. After a time, Amelia remarked meditatively:

"He don't care for me."

Minnie made no answer. From her experience of love in literature Morris Caplan did not, indeed, seem to care for Amelia, and she could not offer false comfort.

"I think he loves *you*," Amelia vouchsafed, smiling wistfully and with a nod that said: "No need to deny it."

Minnie threw her head back and laughed.

"Oh, heavens! I believe you're jealous. You need not be; you may be sure it isn't so, not on his side nor on mine."

But Amelia was not so sure.

Minnie had invited Amelia out to unburden herself of a new worry—the loss of her position. The chief clerk of the Charities, without giving Minnie a hearing, had decided from the nature of the offended substitute's complaint that Minnie was of "that sort"—an anarchist; one who disseminates dissatisfaction, dissension, and in a pinch throws a bomb; the Charities was safer without such.

Delicacy of feeling prompted Minnie to refrain from obtruding her trouble upon Amelia at this time.

* * * * *

"I beg leave to make application for the position of stenographer as per your advertisement in this morning's *New York World*."

Minnie was phrasing the letter in her mind as she lay in bed that night, prevented from sleeping by a complex of thoughts and emotions. What disturbed her almost as much as the loss of her position was the reason for the loss. "I told them the truth and so I became a dangerous person!" The injustice of it hurt. To want to right a wrong—was that to be dangerous? There ought to be *some* redress, *some* justice. But there wasn't, and the realization that there wasn't sickened her with impotence. . . . And Abraham—Abraham would term what she had done an "hysterical outburst;" in fact, he had foretold dismissal. Again a reprimand! She shrank at the thought. How she hated and dreaded these reprimands of his! For what? For standing up for the right. How anyone could think her conduct anything *but* right puzzled her enormously. . . . Morris Caplan had promised her a position if she were ever in need of one, but now she couldn't accept his offer on account of Amelia. . . . To think that that prosaic Amelia was in love, actu-

ally in love as in books! Was Morris Caplan in love with Amelia and was there anything she could do to further the match? . . . It would be marvelous to be in love, too. She wondered whether she ever *would* be in love and what the emotions were like; whether she could love deeply. She glided over the past and wondered where Louis "the paintner" could now be; whether he ever thought of her; whether she would ever see him again. She wondered what would have happened to her had she actually married him; perhaps she would now be a mother of several children, the prototype of Mrs. Argush. She shuddered. . . . As by a breeze her thoughts were wafted upon a future with a gallant knight, learned and tremendously enamored of her, declaring himself passionately, proclaiming her the epitome of all the womanly virtues. . . . Then disgust for the commonplaceness of her life fell upon her. She crossed her arms, placed one hand on each shoulder and strained herself to herself. "Oh, gosh darn it! ding it! the deuce! the dickens! I'm *sick* of it! If I were not poor, if I had a home and the proper protection, I could be a free human being. To think that I am made jobless because I held out for what I considered right! I *hate* dependence upon other people—*hate* it—*hate* it—*hate* it!"

XXXV

Mr. John Maloney, proprietor of the Maloney Paper Box Company, was a genial, blue-eyed Irishman, whose sense of humor, which for a while was daunted by a siege of incompetent stenographers, came into its own again with the acquisition of Mildred Mendel. When Mr. Maloney recognized in Minnie a competent worker

and was sure of her remaining "steady," he told her some of his bitter experiences with a view to making himself roar (there was nothing he enjoyed quite so much) and to hearing the girl's young, merry, responsive giggle—to say nothing of her dancing gray eyes.

"I asked one of 'em to write 'the boxes which ye have is no good.' She wrote 'the w-i-t-c-h ye have is no good,' and I told her if that letter had gone out, I could 'a been arrested for interfering in family affairs." His thundering roar, emanating from a region of layers of bulging belly, filled the office with itself and reverberations and caused Minnie to add her laughter of pleasure.

How Minnie liked John Maloney. He was the first person of the kind she had ever met, a free-and-easy, genial, good-hearted, good-natured, hearty, natural creature.

And John Maloney reciprocated the feeling. She was the first of *her* kind he had met, a girl who could give quick, ready response, serious or funny, who could ruffle her forehead like a grandmother and could giggle like a schoolgirl. "She's a smart kid, by heck," he would say to the salesmen and others of the staff. And soon a cordial relationship between the two was established.

All of which circumstances were gleefully imparted to Abraham, who would listen paternally as Minnie narrated the happenings of the intervals between his visits. Occasionally he would jerk her back by the reins, as it were, quietly, as if by his very manner to inculcate some of his composure, which he so regretted was lacking in her.

"You go at things so spiritedly. Your enthusiasm must necessarily be short-lived. How long, after all,

have you known Mr. Maloney? Two months, and you already think so well of him?"

Her enthusiastic recitals, all to the purpose of boosting a John Maloney, who, sanely analyzed and properly pigeonholed, was a mere Irish paper-box merchant, produced upon Abraham the impression that Minnie was extravagant in the expenditure of energy, of which, he was convinced, she had none too much, because his sisters were stouter and able to walk much farther than she. What a way she had of exaggerating! As at the Charities, with her idea of cheaters and cheated, and now she never said a word about the Charities—blown from her horizon like thistledown. He sighed with the hardship of managing her. Abraham believed he was indignant wholly on Minnie's account; and it is a shame to have to give him away, but the fact was, Abraham was jealous.

Minnie's enthusiasm seemed to remove her farther away from him than did her mere disobedience. He had an actual physical sensation of her slipping out of his hands. To be sure, a very definite something had occurred several weeks earlier to shake him. He and Minnie had unexpectedly encountered Morris Caplan. As this was the first time she had seen Mr. Caplan after Amelia's confession, she promptly carried out her resolution to give Amelia no further occasion for jealousy. Then and there she blurted out in a half-laughing, half-serious way, that she would have to give up teaching him because she was going to be very busy. So much to Abraham's intense gratification. But the very next moment the sun went behind a cloud. Morris Caplan at first refused to take Minnie seriously, then, as she persisted, his face reddened and fell into troubled lines. He

looked sincerely forlorn. He begged her, regardless of Abraham's presence, not to put him so mercilessly adrift. Minnie's heart was touched. Deciding she would tell Amelia with the greatest persuasiveness—and convince her, too—that she need not be jealous, she succumbed to Morris Caplan's pleadings. Abraham suspected Minnie's acquiescence arose from a tender feeling for Morris Caplan, and resented it, though scarcely acknowledging his resentment to himself. (It is really taking a liberty to acknowledge it for him.)

Since that time still other things had arisen to ruffle his serene sky. Once Minnie had refused to let him come to see her simply because she was in no mood for his disciplining; and once when he took her to task for having yielded to Morris Caplan's persuasion, she actually championed her pupil, actually declared he had lots of excellent qualities in spite of his accent and "kikish" manners.

Froward Minnie! Yet there is no washing one's hands easily of tar. Something about Minnie clung to Abraham's heart, which made him pensive, restless, unsatisfied, anxious to keep her steered close to his own shore. This easy swimming of hers into other waters gave him the sensation of his own drowning.

XXXVI

Mrs. Ratkin hesitated before definitely diagnosing her son's case, but once certain of his ailment she knew no peace. She had greater ambitions for her boy. Girls were easily enough to be had. Abraham, so educated, so gentle, so moral! whom could he not aspire to matrimonially? She sighed many a heavy sigh over the fate

he had selected. Love was a matter of propinquity ; had he chosen to visit another girl every Sunday for a year, he could just as readily have fallen in love with her. Not that, God forbid ! anything really disparaging could be said against Minnie Mendel. She was a nice girl, but there were nice girls who were also pretty, strong, wealthy, of real nice families. Why could not Abraham have chosen one of those ? “Nice family” stuck in her mind especially. Had not the Mendel family the skeleton of an arrest—not like the one that had come about in *her* family, by an accident—but a *real* one, a premeditated one ? Mrs. Ratkin sighed. Abraham was too modest always. His aspirations never rose high enough.

She left this bed of thought and heart-sickness one day resolved to pay Sarah a visit. Perhaps her conjectures after all were incorrect. Abraham had said nothing to her ; she had merely drawn conclusions from his preoccupation, his reduced appetite, his frequent visits to Minnie Mendel. Tactfully she would lead Sarah on to talk. Sarah, Mrs. Ratkin reasoned, saw the two together often enough and doubtless knew her daughter’s feelings. Mrs. Ratkin sighed and hoped.

Abraham had never told his mother that Minnie, like Jacob, had left home on account of the stepfather. The whole situation, he was satisfied, could have been avoided if only Minnie had been normally tolerant ; he had shrunk from eliciting the same criticism from his mother. From the first his attitude toward Minnie had been a protective one. While assuming the right to criticize her, since his motives were the tenderest, he felt he must shield her from the criticism of others.

* * * * *

Sarah was alone in the house. It was a Sunday after-

noon. The girls were visiting Minnie, and Leopold Pollack was seeking business advice from Mrs. Tannenbaum, as the bands business was declining steadily. The style had undergone a radical change, from hats raised at one side and in the back to hats flat all around, so that bands were going out of use. The matter had given Sarah and Leopold many days and nights of worry, and Leopold was now gone to see if their business friend could suggest any steps for them to take. Sarah would have accompanied him had she not been feeling indisposed.

She sat thinking of how the years had flown, how the children had grown up, how close to all being over the game was drawing, how queer all of life was. What a stubborn, heartless one Minnie was! Sarah had never forgiven her the cruel slight on the evening of Jacob's graduation.

In this mood it was that Mrs. Ratkin came in upon her.

Minnie? Indeed, Minnie had spurned her mother and her home the very day Leopold Pollack had come into it, as if he were a veritable bum and as if her mother had committed a vile crime in marrying again.

For the very reason that Sarah felt that Mrs. Ratkin was critical of her, she exaggerated her grievances and even indulged in a rhapsody of self-praise so that Minnie's undutifulness might stand out the more flagrant. She had sent the fatherless girl to high school. By four children she had performed the duties of both parents. *What* amount of appreciation was sufficient? And to think that Minnie had quibbled about a little more work, a little less work, about every little thing. And then her heartlessness—to have shunned her own mother and Leopold at Jacob's graduation! Something no mother could forgive. And *now* her crazy stunts—lost an excellent

position at the Peoples Charities, a position of eminence, because of some crazy anarchistic notions.

"God mine! God mine!" thought Mrs. Ratkin. "If he really wants this girl, he must be crazy." She would nip the thing in the bud with the strictest maternal intervention. She sat up straighter, her chin set itself more firmly, and her mother-love and mother-pride joined in staunch mobilization against her son's threatening enemy, Minnie Mendel.

When she had gone, Sarah awoke to the stinging consciousness of having blurted out things she should never have said. She could have bit her tongue off. Why had she taken Mrs. Ratkin—Mrs. Ratkin of all women—into her confidence? Mrs. Ratkin, who had nothing but praise for her own children, who even exaggerated their virtues. Sarah hated herself. When the girls came home, and intending to make her laugh, told her of Minnie and Morris Caplan, she ordered them angrily to keep quiet, slammed the door of her bedroom shut, and locked herself in.

XXXVII

Toward evening Abraham returned from his visit to Minnie, which he had shared with Morris Caplan and Ida and Beckie. She had told stories of John Maloney and of several experiences with him in restaurants to which he had taken her to lunch. Abraham had found her witty, gay, arch, charming. His delighted spirits still hovered around her. If only she would lend herself to sensible discipline, if she would read properly, begin to think properly, what a splendid all-around girl she would be! From out of the depth of his feeling he was ready to

send up a prayer for the power to instil this desirable quality into her. A yearning for Minnie as his wife laid itself like a warm, velvety hand upon his heart.

He and his mother were home alone together. All through supper he was silent, the while Mrs. Ratkin watched him closely. Had Abraham watched his mother just as closely, he would have seen she was hot and nervous, that her hands shook when she served him, and that she sighed and sighed. Finally he left the table and went into the Mission-furnished library to read. Mrs. Ratkin cleared the table, every moment or two peering into the library. She was waiting for a moment when she could feel sure of a steady voice. At last she walked to the threshold between the two rooms and called:

"Abe."

He looked up from his book. "Yes, mother."

"Are you there?"

Always when his mother appended this needless query, Abraham would smile and flutter his eyelids, and reply tenderly, as though speaking to a child:

"No, mother, I am not."

And always Mrs. Ratkin would smile loving appreciation upon her son. This time, however, there was no smile. She coughed and straightened the front of her shirtwaist.

"Abe," she began, obviously steadying her voice, "tell me the truth, are you in love with Minnie Mendel?"

Abraham flushed scarlet. He was too taken aback to make immediate reply. Then a feeling of deep tenderness for his mother and Minnie—as if they were one—came into his heart. He dropped his eyes and answered caressingly:

"Yes, mother."

Mrs. Ratkin went white.

"Do you know her well?" she asked, her voice controlled, her eyes fixed steadfastly upon her son.

"Why, yes," he replied, with an embarrassed smile.

"But *do* you?" the mother insisted, her voice rising. "I visited her mother to-day. Her mother herself says the girl is crazy—is a crazy anarchist—quarrelsome, did not stay a moment in the house after the stepfather, a perfect gentleman, came into it—has been knocking around in all sorts of strange places rather than live with her own mother. *Do* you, my son, know all these things?"

"Yes, mother," Abraham replied, his forehead ruffled, a look of displeasure coming into his eyes and a note of irritation into his voice.

"Well, if you *do*—are there not plenty of *nice* girls in the city of New York?"

"Mother," Abraham replied, "you must not speak this way. You do not know Minnie——"

Mrs. Ratkin experienced an overwhelming sense of having lost, which, however, was at once supplanted by a more vigorous spirit of fight.

"Oh, you, too, must be crazy!" she shouted.

This was the first time in all the years that Mrs. Ratkin had forgotten her latter-day, well-learned mother-dignity.

Abraham flushed.

"Mother!" he cried, rising from his seat and holding her down with his glance. But Mrs. Ratkin was not daunted.

"No girl," she cried, "who does not live at home is worth being courted."

The thought crossed Abraham's mind that Minnie

ought really to live at home, and he averted his eyes as if fearing his mother might read the thought.

"How—what sort of a way is it for a decent girl to live with strangers when she has her own family?" Mrs. Ratkin shrugged her shoulders in blended disgust and incomprehension.

Here Abraham interrupted with greater sharpness than was his wont.

"Mother, you do not know her."

Mrs. Ratkin's objections were not a whit lessened, but she saw her son was unbendable, and keeping as much bitterness out of her tone as she could she said:

"Very well, my son, I hope you will not live to rue it."

The remainder of the evening was spent by both in deep reflection.

"Minnie must be reconciled to her mother," Abraham decided.

"So he has actually asked the girl to marry him!"

Though Mrs. Ratkin's heart bled with anguish, she refused to believe. It could not be that such a calamity was to befall her boy—and her, his mother. There are prospective mothers-in-law whom only the wedding-day convinces.

XXXVIII

Abraham Ratkin had to keep his bed with a cold and fever for three weeks, during which fate formed its own web.

Though Minnie, to all outward appearances, was vivacious and cheerful, in the secret recesses of her being she was restless and filled with longing. Her heart was reaching out, unaccountably, to the inexplicable some-

thing to which all youth feels it has a claim, as if life were planned for giving full satisfaction. Many a time after her friends' visits she would go to her room to drop down on her bed with a great aching emptiness in her heart.

During the weeks that Abraham was ill she was particularly lonely and brooding; a fact upon which a number of people at the Maloney Paper Box office remarked, so that Mr. Maloney bestowed upon her numerous side glances of apprehension. Was she, he wondered, like himself, finding their mere office association inadequate?

A plan had arisen and revolved in his mind and each day drew nearer to fruition, when one morning Minnie came suddenly upon him with the announcement that she had decided to give up her position in his office.

XXXIX

On an evening when Minnie was in a particularly disgruntled mood, she entered the dining-room for supper to find Amelia Rubin in tears. Amelia was hungry, and the supper, it seemed, was not graciously putting itself out to cater to her appetite. The soup was not the sort she liked, the meat was tough, the boiled potato was soapy, the spinach, to her taste an atrocity at best, was gritty, and her share of lettuce was withered as if from old age. Amelia looked up at Minnie with tears in her eyes. It was the busy season "by shirtwaists," and the over-worked Amelia poured out the list of her hardships in almost one breath. The greatest of her grievances was that at the officers' table sat the pudgy, under-worked matron with a dish of lettuce verily of the class of the Elite of the Vegetable Kingdom. Did she deserve it

more than Amelia? As if Amelia had not slaved the whole day! As if the matron toiled any harder, as if what was good for her was not good for Amelia, too!

Less than this was needed to rouse Minnie's ire that evening. She had gone about from task to task during the day in morose silence, with a deep distaste for the pettinesses that filled her life. She yearned; she ached, for she hardly knew what—for some onward, upward, forward stride. Impulsively she grabbed up Amelia's plate of lettuce and stalked with it over to the matron's table. She demanded, red in the face, quivering from head to foot with indignation and looking fierce enough to throw the lettuce in the matron's face:

"Do you call this fit to *eat*?"

Girls at nearby tables suspended all activity, whether chatting or the consuming of food, and gaped open-mouthed. It was an unprecedented impertinence. No one had ever before dared to break the sacred convention of utmost respect due the matron. The worthy lady raised herself slightly from her chair.

"How DARE you?"

"How dare YOU?"

Minnie deliberately emptied Amelia's plate of its lettuce, took several leaves from the matron's plate, stalked back with it, head high, to Amelia's table, and set the Better Goods before her, under her breath muttering: "Mean, unfair, unjust." Then she retired to her room, where she threw herself down on the bed.

In a few moments there came a summons from the superintendent. Minnie went to the office prepared to defend her misdemeanor.

"Well, Mildred Mendel, what's this I hear about you?"

"I did it."

"Have you any excuse to offer?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"I don't think it's fair. Amelia was just as tired, just as hungry as the matron and deserved nice lettuce, too."

"What was the matter with the lettuce?"

"It was rotten."

"Couldn't Amelia tell about it without your quarrelsome interference?"

"It was no accident that the matron's lettuce was nice and Amelia's bad. It was an unfair discrimination. It happens lots of times. The matron ought not to eat in the same room at the same time, then."

The superintendent laughed.

"You're a regular little anarchist, eh?"

"I don't know what you call it."

The superintendent whisked her under the chin, and her manner said something about Minnie being awfully young.

"Where do you work now?"

"In a paper-box house."

The superintendent reflected.

"Are you sort of unhappy about things?"

How had the superintendent guessed! Minnie's eyelids quivered. She made no reply.

"I know of a position that is open in the Academy Settlement, secretary to the headworker. It would be a nice environment for you. Do you think you would like the change?"

The darling, wonderful superintendent! Always she was doing something just great. Minnie's heart fairly melted with regret at having caused a disturbance, and if she had not felt that justice was on her side, she might

have said she was sorry. As it was, she only wiped tears from her eyes and thanked the superintendent.

Three hours later she was the engaged secretary of Doctor Evangel; and the following morning she gave notice to John Maloney that in a week she would leave.

XL

"Yer a foolish kid. I'd keep on raising ye till ye'd be dizzy."

Minnie laughed, though she felt badly at having to disappoint Mr. Maloney.

When he had been finally convinced of her inflexibility, he had assumed an aggrieved attitude, and for a few days had scarcely a word to say to her, which caused her sincere pain, so that one noontime when he invited her to lunch, she accepted with no mincing of eagerness, and at once dropped her work, washed her hands, and donned her hat and coat. Mr. Maloney observed that she had difficulty in keeping the tears back. He himself was feeling rather mournful.

He chose a new dining-place, and, what surprised Minnie more, requested a private dining-room.

"I'll miss ye, kid," he said, when they were seated and the waiter had disappeared with the order.

"You will not be too angry to come to see me, Mr. Maloney?" Minnie asked earnestly.

"But what makes ye so stubborn about *leaving*?" He resorted to persuasion again. "What's in a settlement house? Hard work, small pay, long hours—'exploitation,' as ye yourself call it." Mr. Maloney almost emitted a roar, but the occasion was too solemn to permit of the

indulgence, and he only smiled, Minnie accompanying him with a sorry attempt at the same.

"Give up the idea, kid," he tried again.

"I don't like business; it does not interest me."

Mr. Maloney raised his eyes hastily in involuntary disapproval of the words so uncomplimentary to his Sacred Covenant with Paper Boxes.

"But yer interested in that there other thing, too—that there social justice stunt. If ye do less in the day, ye have more time and ambition for the other at night." With sudden fresh enthusiasm he added: "Ugh, I know those settlement joints. The gerrls work there till they're old maids." This with a glance at Minnie that said "Beware!"

Minnie, to whom the idea was new, burst out laughing. Ordinarily Mr. Maloney could not have resisted the infection of her laugh. The vital matter in his mind pinned him down to sobriety. He surveyed his fingernails, then dug them deep into his palm.

"Mildred," he began quaveringly, his breath coming short (the "Mildred" startled her as he had always addressed her as "Miss Mendel"), "will ye be willing to marry me?"

Minnie stared. Was the man who had just spoken Mr. John Maloney, her employer, proprietor of the Maloney Paper Box Company? She was mute.

The waiter appeared with the order. Sensing something (in the way of waiters), he set the dishes down hastily and disappeared with a faint, knowing grin.

Minnie's heart-beats thundered so in her ears that she was afraid Mr. Maloney would hear them. She fastened her eyes on her bowl of cereal.

"Well, Mildred," Mr. Maloney said eagerly when the

door had closed on the waiter, "I'm a rich feller; I'll take good care of ye. And that there social justice business" (Minnie had told him the circumstances of her discharge from the Charities) "don't cut no ice with me; ye kin go as far as ye like with me." Mr. Maloney was pleased with his indulgent spirit and returned the upper half of his profuse body to the back of his chair with an air of self-esteem.

Minnie still sat speechless. Wiping his forehead with an exceptionally large handkerchief, Mr. Maloney continued:

"If ye were married to a rich man, ye could do yer settlement work better even—ye could do anything ye please."

Minnie's mind was startled out of itself. Her imagination launched her upon membership in the Ladies' Aid Society of the Helina Heimath, donned her with clothes of simple, expensive, subdued elegance, rendered her benefactress of countless ice-cream-and-cake treats to the children of the Heimath, gave her the opportunity to shake hands society fashion (from up down) with the superintendent of the Heimath, and endowed her with the right to engage another matron for the Alpha Home.

She was jostled out of her fancies by Mr. Maloney, fat and forty, who, interpreting her silence favorably, had ardently emitted:

"Darling!" He was leaning forward in his seat. His moist, fat hand sought to enslave hers.

She snatched her hand away under the shock of a physical revulsion such as only the aesthetic young know.

"Oh, Mr. Maloney!" she gasped.

Fear that it would not be such smooth sailing pierced Mr. Maloney's heart. He rose and came closer. Minnie

also rose. Mr. Maloney wanted to, but dared not, take her in his arms.

"I can give ye everything money can buy," he said limply in comparison with the fervor of his feelings. "What have ye now, living in a working gerrls' home, with ten dollars a week wages—better—*look* at the advantages." He spread his hands. They extended only a little beyond his huge bulk, and Minnie noticing it turned sick. Then, too, the "New Woman" in her, whom she had come to know through her reading, was outraged. With a trace of histrionicism, she asked:

"Do you think I can be bought like *merchandise*?"

Mr. Maloney winced. He had not expected that Minnie would be unwilling. Secretly he thought: "That little snipper!" Aloud he said: "Wait till yer a bit older. Ye'll be glad to git a feller like me; they don't grow in five-and-ten-cent stores."

Minnie reached for her coat. He took it, and, while helping her on with it, tried to snatch a kiss. Minnie shuddered and withdrew. Her vision played her a trick: Mr. Maloney spread and multiplied into the foreman of the Titanic Biscuit Company, the Doctor of the past, Louis "the paintner."

Mr. Maloney took hasty notice of the fact that most of the food they had ordered remained on the table untouched, and he was not without regret on this detail as he led the way out.

XLI

That same evening Abraham, who had recovered from his cold, came to call on Minnie. The news of her change of position annoyed him immensely. Could she

not have waited for *advice*? The gross folly of returning to charity work when it was such a trial to her temper! Before long she would again be playing ball with "cheaters" and "cheated"—getting herself into trouble—losing another position. Wasn't the very lettuce incident evidence? Abraham fairly puffed with disapproval. He rose and made nervous strides across the Alpha Home sitting-room.

Minnie sat self-conscious and mortally put out by his eternal faultfinding. She could have bitten her tongue off for having spoken. She had made up her mind innumerable times to refrain from taking him into her confidence, and then had prattled, prattled like a ridiculous child. Just because she grew so tense she couldn't keep things to herself. She was thoroughly disgusted with herself for growing so tense.

As Abraham paced the room the slit of the back of his coat, opening and closing alternately, revealed and hid a small button. It revolted Minnie, and as she watched the movement of Abraham's thin legs, she felt a vague dislike of him creep upon her. As if to get farther away from him, she drew deeper into her chair. If *only* he would sit down. Yet she felt an indescribable respect for him and was grateful for his interest in her. Wearied by her conflicting feelings, she sighed and covered her eyes with her hands. When she removed them, after a time, she saw Abraham, who thought she was in tears, standing in front of her. Since she was not in tears, he retired to his chair, from where he regarded her fixedly and began to talk of what was greatly on his mind.

"Minnie, you know you are a young woman now, nearly twenty. Soon you'll be thinking of getting married."

Minnie's heart leaped. She thought of Mr. Maloney. She gave Abraham a hasty look of inquiry.

"Do you know, Minnie, your being away from home is going to speak against you——" He hesitated, his eyelids fluttering. He scarcely knew how to say what had been on his heart to say the whole three weeks of his interfering illness.

Speak against her! As if love needed credentials! She flushed and scowled. What would be his next step in the mathematical mapping out of her life?

"A man has his family to satisfy. A girl who does not live at home is sort of—sort of looked down upon." His heart ached; he hated to hurt her. As if to stifle a sigh, he brought his hand up to his mouth with self-conscious clumsiness. A sharp, fierce resentment of Abraham seized Minnie and at the same time a lunatic fear that he might touch her. She shrank back visibly.

Some girls entered the room and Abraham suggested a walk, checking the refusal on Minnie's lips by handing her her hat, which she had brought down in preparation for their customary stroll.

"I am convinced, Minnie," he said, when they were on the street, "that you ought to go home to your people. The other girls find it possible to stay at home. I don't see why *you* can't, too. It would be so much more decent."

It was like a physical onslaught. Presently the acute sensation of shock passed over into indignation. He was prescribing by formula. Soon he would be telling her to mould her nose into the shape of some one else's. Individual circumstances did not exist for him; all people must act in the same way, have the same feelings, the same thoughts. She hated him. She wished she could

run away from him. As in the old days with "Fights," so now again he was reducing her to impotence and irresoluteness.

"Have you ever thought how a man in love with you would feel about your living in a working-girls' home?"

A childish passion to prove him in the wrong possessed her.

"Don't be so sure you know how *every* man would feel," she burst out. "Mr. Maloney asked me to marry him and he knows I live in the Home. There now!"

There were more things seething within her that would not frame themselves into words.

Abraham spun round like a top. His hat tipped a little to one side, and his lips parted.

"What was that?" he asked.

"YES! You heard right!" She drew away from him.

They walked several blocks in silence. Abraham was thinking: "She is indignant. Poor little girl. Perhaps I am too critical. It must be hard for her to realize that I love her so when I am always finding fault. What difference does it really make that she lives in a home? Mama will come round when she gets to know her better. With all her faults she is mighty sweet, mighty sweet." He recalled her pretty repartee, her merry laugh. He forgave her everything from the bottom of his heart, and felt nothing but tenderness for her. He smiled indulgently at the thought of Mr. Maloney, a gentile, fat, elderly, aspiring Minnieward. He looked round at his Minnie. Her face was pale and troubled. He took her by the elbow. Poor little girl.

They walked on in silence. This evening he would not tell her, he decided. He would wait until Sunday when he would be feeling better and she would be in a more

suitable frame of mind. His thoughts journeyed pleasantly to a few years hence when he would be sufficiently advanced as to salary and the sweet creature beside him would be his own little wife.

As he was still a convalescent and the prescribed hour for going to bed was nine o'clock, he very tenderly suggested that they return to the Alpha Home, so that he might take leave, so tenderly, indeed, that Minnie looked at him once to make sure, and a second time to express gratitude.

* * * * *

Morris Caplan's bank account was not doing him any special good that he could see. The muffled sounds of his first-class boarding-house were getting on his nerves. There were evenings when he felt moved to pound on its walls merely for the sake of disturbing the gentility of the atmosphere. On other evenings, of milder moods, he had visions of a home of his own, the patter of children's feet, a refined woman's voice; and if these happened to be lesson evenings, he found extra delight in Minnie's company and allowed himself to hope for a happy future. But when he compared himself with Abraham Ratkin, a college graduate, who was also in the arena, his hopes paled.

"Kike," he would rebuke himself for his audacity, "where do you creep?" and he would try to forget himself in the company of gayer young women with whom he would skip off to dances, vaudeville shows, and late-hour eating-houses. He would spend lavishly and conduct himself like an all-round good sport, overdoing everything to work the self-depreciation out of his system. Afterwards he would return to his room to brood and philosophize that all the world's a fool and he not

the least of fools in it. One evening, in a charitable frame of mind toward himself, he allowed that after all he wasn't such a bad "feller," he would make a good husband; at thirty-six a man was bound to know how to treat a woman. With money to burn and a good heart to boot, why might he not be as desirable as a whipper-snapper of an Abraham Ratkin, who, though he boasted an intellectual forehead, could provide a wife with no greater luxury than bread and cheese? "He thinks he takes the cake!" Before long Morris Caplan saw himself as not so unworthy a competitor and as mighty much of a damn fool for having waited so long before at least giving himself a chance. "Why, the girl might actually be caring for me!" He swelled. "Otherwise why would she keep on giving me lessons and without accepting pay?" He owed it to himself and to her at least to "find out, to make sure one way or 'die yadder.'"

He reached the Alpha Home just as Abraham Ratkin was taking leave.

For his part, Morris Caplan was mighty pleased that colds were included in the scheme of things, so that Abraham Ratkin was obliged just then to keep early hours. Morris Caplan's satisfaction reached Abraham, who scowled, and would have changed his mind and stayed, had he not been afraid of appearing ridiculous.

The moment Morris Caplan and Minnie entered the Alpha Home sitting-room, she dropped into a chair, gave a whistling sigh, threw her hands up and laughed tearfully. Naturally, Morris Caplan was curious. Minnie exploded.

"Oh, he makes me sick and tired. He wears me out. He is forever trying to make me over. I am always at fault about everything, everywhere, every time, now, for-

ever, and a day later." She laughed again and shook herself as if to throw off Abraham's presence. The tears were in her eyes, and her feelings were tense enough to have warranted a spell of hysteria.

To Morris Caplan the heavens opened. In a burst of brilliance he saw Minnie in a bridal veil tripping by *his* side. So that Ratkin "feller" was not her favorite! His heart fairly danced within him. The Alpha Home sitting-room was too small, too familiar for his new emotions.

He proposed a walk.

"I've just come back."

"But you wuzent in pleasant company."

She smiled and went. It was a mild evening. Morris Caplan led her to a bench in Central Park. Minnie was silent because of a mind crowded with thought. Morris Caplan was silent because of the turbulence of his heart. How to say it! When to say it! He felt suddenly like a silly boy. She was so much younger than he. He was accustomed to being a bachelor. Muffled sounds of his boarding-house reached his ears—the loneliness and drabness of it. How much nicer a home and an end of eating in restaurants—a child or two. . . . He turned impulsively and laid his hand on Minnie's, which was resting in her lap.

"What is it?" Minnie asked.

Simply as a child, he told her:

"I love you. I think you have no faults." What better could he say as a rival of Abraham Ratkin?

She looked at him smilingly, thinking he was jesting. But no, she could tell from his face he was in earnest. She tried to withdraw her hand. He held it more firmly. A faint anxiety came into his eyes. He was experiencing

one of those moments of intense suspense in which a man sees his fate swinging in the balance.

From sheer nervousness Minnie laughed.

Morris Caplan was annoyed.

"Don't laugh!" he said, squeezing her hand.

She tried to wrench her hand away. She was in a turmoil of alarm, incredulousness, resentment, as though Morris Caplan were unjustly imposing something upon her. It was a horrid situation. Poor Amelia! And two proposals in one day! Heavens, everything had to happen to her.

"Let go my hand, Mr. Caplan. Ah, *please* let go my hand."

Morris Caplan became determined. When a man feels that the step he has taken is too daring, he cannot bear to find his opinion corroborated. Minnie was an American lady, who probably, like the rest, dubbed him "kike." He gripped her hand harder and leaned over.

"You mane you are in love wid det Ratkin feller?"

"No, of course not. You are *hurting* me. What in the world is the matter with you? *Please* let go my hand."

Minnie's unfailing friendliness, Morris Caplan now felt, had given him the right to feel encouraged. Had her friendliness been hypocritical? Had she planned to make a fool of him?

"Oh, here comes somebody. Let go my hand."

He relaxed his hold. Minnie jumped up and ran.

Morris Caplan was stunned. Then he rose and started in pursuit, but Minnie was already at the park entrance. There was no use trying to overtake her.

So the girl *had* made a fool of him! The impudent infant! He was furious—like a teased animal. . . . He

spat upon the pavement. . . . "She's a young fool," he thought. "What do *I* care!" . . . But Minnie's great, gray eyes danced upon his senses, her gay laugh, her soft, fetching manner. He sank down on the bench. He loved the little girl. What a foolish child! He had money to burn; he would be so good to her, he would carry her about in his arms to save her footsteps. If only she had some sense! What would a Yankee feller do for her? Find fault. She had an example in that Ratkin feller, who plagued her to make herself over. What fools young girls were not to see who would make them good husbands. He himself would always feel that he had drawn a prize—cherish her—shield her. Whatever she did would be golden in his eyes.

Morris Caplan's soul stretched out its arms to her while Minnie, muttering to herself in astonishment: "He *really* meant it, he really meant it!" and, laughing hysterically, ran faster and faster toward the wings of the Alpha Home for Working Girls.

XLII

"I wish he asked me. You may bet I'd marry him even if he is a kike. You fool, he has money. You've forgotten already how we used to live when we were poor. Money is a mighty good friend."

The propounder of this cynical philosophy was Ida. It was the night after the two proposals and after Minnie's first day of work at the Settlement. She and Ida and Beckie were out walking together. Excited by the new work, fagged out by a sleepless night following upon the strange happenings of the day before, with her heart full to the brim, she had taken the girls into her confi-

dence. Where else had she to turn? Miss Liebman was busy with her own friends, and it was out of the question to tell Amelia.

Beckie, conjuring up delightful pictures of a married sister living maybe on Riverside Drive, chimed in with her advice:

"I think you ought to *grab* him. You get used to a man."

Minnie felt she was in the presence of infinitely wise people and silently marvelled at them. That marriage was a way out had never occurred to her; in books and in her own imagination marriage was a mating of love.

"You ought to see mama, how she looks. She looks dreadful. All on account of the rotten bands. Bands don't sell now, so she worries herself to a skeleton. But if she had married a *rich* man instead of that *habe nichts* (have nothing) of a Leopold, we would all of us be better off now—she, too." Ida, though bitterly resentful, was genuinely distressed about her mother. Flat hats had persisted, and the bands business had continued to deteriorate. Ida had experienced her first shock when her mother announced that she and Beckie must each contribute two dollars a week more from their salaries to the home. By their mother's efforts Ida had been taught stenography and Beckie had procured a good position as saleslady. It was not until Sarah had been drawing heavily from the bank for several months that she resorted to this radical step. "Not, God forbid," she solemnly vowed, "that ever in my life I will take one cent from them for my *own* support. But themselves it is time they supported."

Ida was feeling the sting of poverty. With a weakness for pretty clothes, eight dollars a week, reduced by

five for mere food and shelter, put her in a mood for the practical appreciation of a rich "kike."

Ida's description of her mother's condition went to Minnie's heart. The image of the mother of Henry Street, toiling and harassed, blotted out the image of the wife of Leopold who had neglected to visit the sick daughter at a charity institution.

"Of course, I don't say anything about Mr. Maloney," Ida continued. "He's a gentile. But Morris Caplan is a Jew. If you've got all your life to teach him in, he'll have time to learn to say 'truth' instead of 'throat.' Such men make the best husbands."

"But I don't love him," Minnie ventured weakly.

"Nu—and if you *don't*?" Ida pooh-poohed.

Ida's vulgar certainty undermined Minnie's confidence in her own feelings. She made no retort. Was Ida right, were love marriages a mere vagary of literature? And because Mr. Maloney was a gentile—was that the *only* reason she ought not to consider him?

The girls' visit left Minnie more upset than ever. She was sorry she had taken them into her confidence. All she had achieved was a shaken belief in herself—perhaps she was sentimental—and contempt of Ida's vulgar practicalness.

XLIII

The rolling gentlemen's voices and the warbling women's voices of the Academy Settlement House were to Minnie reverberations from a background of awe-inspiring culture. Self-confidence, never a staunch ally of hers, now beat a complete retreat. She felt like a common house-fly that has strayed into a king's palace to

find that not another insect has had the same audacity. She walked about on tiptoe and spoke in whispers, all the while despising herself and fighting desperately to overcome her timidity and assume a natural manner. There were moments when she would shed a tear of homesickness for the genial Maloney place.

The third day a young man of breezy western manner, of a full, resonant voice, and of the unpromising name of Grave, appeared upon the scene and dispelled the clouds.

"This is Miss Mendel, is it?" he brawled.

Minnie, blushing, rose from her seat.

"Yes," she said with a puzzled look, and stood shyly expectant of an explanation.

Mr. Grave danced his deep blue eyes over her face and laughed pleasantly.

"Well, now, I'm Mr. Grave, one of the fourteen resident club directors of this Arcadia, and I have come to you, the guardian angel of the world's elixir—money—to cash a fifty-dollar check."

Minnie laughed a modulated giggle, blushed a trifle deeper, inclined her head to one side, and replied, her gray eyes sparkling:

"I am here to serve you now and always gladly, fair sir." She looked up at his shock of blond hair and moved to the safe in the corner of the office. Mr. Grave's jolly glance followed her. Stooping to open the combination, she looked up and their eyes met. They laughed.

"She's a bully sort," went through Mr. Grave's mind.

"What a nice man!" went through Minnie's mind.

He bowed graciously and thanked her cordially for the cash.

"I know a man," said Minnie, "who would say 'danks

a toysend times.' " Mr. Grave's laugh covered a full scale of notes.

His carriage as he walked out of the office recalled someone in the past to Minnie. She spent a few moments wondering who it could be.

The little encounter colored her whole day. Every now and then she found herself hoping Mr. Grave would come in again and assuring herself he would. The prospect buoyed her.

The air as she walked home seemed to have a fresher tang. It was well after all, she rejoiced, that she had left John Maloney's place. What was the use of the same old thing day after day? New experiences added vividness to life. She was glad she had made the change. Abraham Ratkin had certainly been wrong when he said that she would meet with the same trials at the settlement as at the Charities. The settlement, though a philanthropy, was of a different character; people did not come there to cry; they came to amuse themselves, to dance, to sit around and to have fun. And it had the advantage of a far more cultured environment than the John Maloney Paper Box Company. All seemed well with the world to Minnie.

Mr. Grave came again the next day for a pencil, the day after for a friendly word or two, which kept him with Minnie for fully fifteen minutes; then he came in for a telephone number, which detained Minnie fully ten minutes after closing hour. Out of appreciation he asked to be allowed to see her to the street car.

Walking beside Mr. Grave, talking, laughing with him as if he were a mere man instead of a god, transported Minnie to a world of unreality. His voice sounded in her ears like exhilarating music; her own person seemed

a dream afloat. By the time he left her she was tingling with excitement.

Thenceforth Mr. Grave paid daily calls. He seemed to Minnie the perfect man, of incomparable manners. And in spite of his perfection, he looked upon her, apparently, as someone from whom he could learn. Often he laughed over what she said and called her a bright little girl. She was intensely grateful. Praise was novel. Morris Caplan's admiration, because it was evoked by the things concerning which she herself felt confident, had affected her differently. Her very name pronounced at the Settlement—Miss Mendel—sounded fine and dignified. She became less of a nobody to herself. And as her timidity fell away, her efficiency increased. Everybody came to Dr. Evangel's secretary with the assurance that what was asked of her would be properly attended to. Soon she became a person of standing at the Settlement.

XLIV

Minnie was conscious of a joy in living. The days with their whirl of interesting activities and the evenings with their comparative comfort at the Alpha Home were a song; Mr. Grave was the sweet refrain. Life became a pleasurable adventure with all sorts of thrilling possibilities. Something interesting might happen any moment—when the door-bell at the Alpha Home sounded, or the telephone at the Settlement rang, or a knock came at the office door. Minnie was young. She had never been young before.

The happiness she got from roaming among dreams and fancies woven from the experiences of the day often

drew her out evenings for long walks by herself. Besides, she now enjoyed the life of the streets. A sense of kinship for all these men and women colored their doings with a new interest. Some instinct told her they, too, had their dreams. Her step was buoyant, her eyes eager.

One evening her attention was drawn by a crowd on a side street just off a main avenue, and she heard a man's voice above the rattle of vehicles, clear, strong, vibrant. It came from an orator mounted on an improvised platform with his back against a large banner displaying the emblem of the arm and torch.

"Much is said about the sacredness of life, but we stow human beings away in East Side hovels to breed disease, to suffer and decay——"

The orator's voice sounded like Mr. Grave's!

"Much is said about the sacredness of parenthood, yet we send the father to the sweat shop and let him out when he is too exhausted to think of anything beside his wretched cot for rest——"

Strange that his voice should sound so much like Mr. Grave's! Minnie recalled that at their first meeting Mr. Grave had evoked something reminiscential in her. She peered at the speaker but his face was partly in shadow and she could not make out his features.

"Much is said about the divinity of motherhood, yet we send mothers to other people's houses to wash and scrub and back to the reeking tenement, wretched and aching, to bestow a lick and a promise upon her *own* babies. . . .

His words, sincere and sympathetic, which seemed so to apply to her family's life, sent a queer little chill down Minnie's spine. And his voice and the lift of his shoul-

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ders were so like Mr. Grave's! Now he took a step backward—his face fell in full light—Gregory Chernin! *That's* who it was! Their eyes met. He seemed to see the excitement in hers and smiled down upon her. His smile seemed to ask that she wait until his speech was over, to say that he would join her presently. She found herself nodding and smiling back, feeling a happy peace.

"In the mills and the mines we crush our babies whom we liken to birds and flowers, crush them before they have a chance to open their petals. Then with well-serving stupidity we screw up our foreheads in perplexity and make a scientific study of why homes are broken up, why men desert wives, why there need be children's penitentiaries, why there is insanity, theft and murder. We avert our eyes from the uncomfortable truth——"

Had she been able to put her thoughts into words, she would have said just that. It seemed incredible to Minnie that there was another human being who thought so exactly as she did. She had believed herself to be alone in her philosophy, freakish, eccentric. She felt peculiarly jubilant.

"We reduce a man to the level of a dog and then we hang him because he does not behave like a man."

The audience laughed and clapped. Minnie was suffused with the pride that one takes in the successes of a blood relation.

Gregory, who seemed to be only the introductory speaker, was soon shaking hands heartily with her on the sidewalk, and inviting her to come with him to a nearby restaurant, as he had not yet supped. She was keenly and pleasurably conscious that he was glad to see her.

At table she allowed herself a full look at her tall, manly companion. His face was altered from the col-

lege lad's of her gaming days, and yet it was what Minnie felt she would somehow have expected. It was thin, pale, and worn. His brown shock of hair was a little thinner. His eyes were Olga's, large and brown, with her love of humanity shining in them and an added touch of reflectiveness and also of humor. He looked like one, Minnie felt, of whom big things were to be expected. But for his cordial smile, she might have felt self-conscious at being in the presence of someone obviously her superior in learning and breeding. As it was, she was experiencing peace, a happy peace, different from the turbulent, agitating happiness of her association with Mr. Grave.

The waiter came for the order.

"You'll have something to eat, too," Gregory urged. His courtesy was delicious—like Mr. Grave's.

The waiter disappeared with their orders.

Gregory settled himself in an easy posture, with his elbows on the table and his hands clasped, his eyes resting on Minnie's face. He began gravely:

"You were on my mother's conscience. But it is quite apparent she had no cause to worry."

At this blunt reference to a disreputable past, which Minnie had flung behind her as Sarah had her poverty, she flushed, looked up hastily, on the verge of annoyance. She met a frank, disarming gaze. Gregory seemed wholesomely detached from that past of which he had as much cause to be ashamed as she. She felt somehow assured that his and not hers was the proper attitude; that his was the bigger attitude, the impersonal one. She dropped her eyes.

"How is your mother?" she asked.

"She's dead," Gregory answered simply.

"Oh!" Minnie exclaimed, experiencing the horrifying

sense of an adult's first contact with death. After a pause, she asked:

"And your father?"

"He died too—first. Mother died of the same illness."

Minnie caught the deep feeling beneath the simplicity of his utterance.

"But tell me about yourself," he added.

She looked up at him with dimmed eyes. His pallor and thinness connected itself painfully in her heart with his parents. A tender feeling rose in her for Gregory, a feeling of closeness to him.

"I have had lots of experience," she said, half smiling, half weeping, "but you know how it is with experiences; they loom large to those who go through them, but in the telling they seem small enough."

"Tell me anyway," he said, his voice and manner so gentle that Minnie felt herself expanding toward him.

She told him everything, even of her engagement to Louis "the painter." Neither her mind nor her will seemed to have anything to do with her frank outpouring. It was as if the impulse came from Gregory. With a little smile she ended: "And now I'm well and happy."

Gregory stroked his chin and looked into space, then turned his eyes on her gently.

"You *have* had lots of experiences. They do *not* seem little." He was silent a moment and then added warmly: "You have outwitted the evil fate we all feared was in store for you."

Minnie felt with a thrill the commendation implied in his words and tone, the recognition that she had struggled and achieved; and by contrast the eternally fault-finding Abraham came to her mind. Quickly she made mental comparison of his dry presentation of Socialism with Gregory's warm-hearted speech. She said:

"It was something so new to me—your way of presenting Socialism. I always think that way about life, but I have a friend who tells me it is too formless, too"—she ruffled her forehead—"too hysterical. He wants me to read *Value, Price and Profit*——"

Gregory laughed a short, hearty laugh. An exquisite joy shot through Minnie's heart. He laughed exactly like Mr. Grave! A fine, thin note of adoration made music in her soul.

"Your friend must be a pedant," said Gregory.

Aha! A pedant! That's what Abraham was. Gregory had summed him up for her. How well Gregory understood everything! How nice it was to talk to someone who understood! It seemed to make one's thoughts come easier. How nice it would be to have him for a friend. Where was he living, what was he doing?

"I told you," she said, "all about myself. I think I deserve that you tell me about yourself. I suppose"—her voice and look were full of sympathy—"that being without a home you have had to knock about a whole lot. That's so hard."

Gregory gave her a look of appreciation for her compassionate insight.

His tale was simple. After graduating from college he taught for some time, then, finding that he was cramped by the conditions imposed upon the public school teachers, he gave up the profession to become a propagandist for the Socialist Party.

It was time to leave. As Minnie watched Gregory settle with the waiter in a smiling way that reminded her of Mr. Grave again, she was moved by a girlish ebullition to discuss with this new-old friend who "understood" a question that had occupied her and Mr. Grave in the afternoon.

"Do you think," she began as soon as they were on the street, "that happiness comes altogether from within? Don't be surprised," she smiled, "at my question out of a clear sky; but I started out on a walk this evening especially to think about it when your audience attracted me, and you've captivated my thoughts ever since."

Gregory smiled and reflected.

"Well, happiness, I suppose, does come from within, but only if the external possibilities for happiness exist. For instance, no amount of the 'within' will make a man happy if he is forced to keep his toe on a red-hot stove."

Minnie laughed delightedly. Here were her own feelings exactly expressed; here was her answer to Mr. Grave, whose whole life had been smooth sailing and who had insisted that happiness is entirely a matter of "within."

At the door of the Alpha Home Minnie was seized unaccountably by a panicky feeling. Would Gregory say he would come to see her, or ought she ask him to?

He held out his hand, and said as if in answer to her thoughts:

"I am afraid I cannot see you soon again. To-morrow I leave on a speaking tour of the New England States. I'm awfully sorry." He shook hands with her.

For a moment she felt terribly forsaken. But Mr. Grave—she would see him in the morning. She felt light-hearted again.

But as she made her way upstairs a vague emptiness pervaded her soul, a tearfulness, a low-burning disappointment.

XLV

A modest man retains his modesty until the thing of which he deemed himself undeserving is actually denied

him, then he sees no reason under the sun why he should not possess it. So it was with Morris Caplan.

The morning after Minnie's odd behavior, he awoke, metaphorically speaking, with a dark brown taste in his mouth. Everything was wrong with the world. He was suffering, not from the sweet melancholia that the poets would have us believe goes hand in hand with a love disappointment, but from an irritability that turned everything around him black. A slip of a girl, a waif in a working girl's home had made a fool of him. He spat out shreds of tobacco with unwonted vehemence.

In the course of the day, however, his mood changed: he entered a demurrer against fate. Why should he live always in a boarding-house and eat in restaurants? Why should he make money for nobody?

When the summons came, Minnie was in her room engaged in delightful reveries of a sprightly half-hour's confab that day with Mr. Grave. She had been surprised to find that he did not remind her so much of Gregory as Gregory had, the night before, reminded her of him. Even their voices had now a dissimilar ring; the bantering quality was absent from Gregory's tone. By the end of the half-hour Mr. Grave had somehow seemed to relegate Gregory to a dream-world in Minnie's mind. Her meeting with him sank suddenly into a shadowy past, while Mr. Grave remained vividly present, a substantial reality of her daily life.

In the Alpha Home for Working Girls, no such formal procedure was observed as the announcing of a visitor's name. Minnie went downstairs wondering who the man could be who had asked to see her. Abraham Ratkin, possibly. But she was not expecting him until Sunday. What could be bringing him so soon again? She wished

he would not come so unceremoniously, as if she had always to be at his disposal.

At sight of Morris Caplan she was greatly disconcerted. She flushed, hung her head, and stammered a greeting.

He, too, had the earmarks of one not precisely at ease.

They seated themselves. Did Mr. Caplan want to see Amelia perhaps? He frowned and answered impatiently that she knew very well he did not want to see Amelia. How should *she* know, she demanded, while her mind went round in a whirl—had he actually meant that night's proposal, had he actually meant it? In the excitement of other things, she had more or less dismissed it from her mind, as much as any girl can dismiss a proposal of marriage from her mind.

Morris Caplan was determined upon having no nonsense this evening; he would not take "no" for an answer. Moreover, he would not go out where there was the whole wide world for her to escape to, but would keep her right there in the sitting-room, where in the bright light she had to look him straight in the eye and say definitely that she would marry him—when—and so on.

His heart fluttered as his mind strutted.

"Now, then, Mees Mendel," he began, "I meant what I said last night, and you did a most insulting thing to run away from me as if I insulted you." He went on, in what struck Minnie as a disgustingly dictatorial manner, to tell her it was her duty to give and his privilege to have an answer, a direct, truthful answer (Minnie noted with a little shiver coursing along her spine that he said "throatful" and "answear"), and considering his position—a very successful real estate dealer—it would behoove a poor girl without a home or a family to think seriously about it.

Poor Morris Caplan, he only succeeded in disgusting Minnie, to whom it was not apparent that he was making a desperate effort to keep his courage from oozing away, or that his heavy gold watch chain rose and fell with his labored heavings, or that the pulse of his neck was throbbing under his too roomy collar. His nerve! a kike! even Mr. Maloney had spoken more respectfully, more as if he were asking something of her than as if he were doing her a favor. His nasty money! He spoke like an onion grater! Ida would have him—why did he not propose to her? Poor Amelia! She was in love with him. Served Amelia right—for loving such a dub. Such a dub! how could anyone love him! Yet he was a good-hearted person. And how he used to laugh at her friskiness! Why could it not have continued? Now an end of him—an end of lessons. He was taking advantage of her. Because she gave him lessons he thought she was in love with him. If he touched her she would die. Think of kissing him—on the lips, his thick lips—his red face, his paunch—almost like the landlord's they used to have on Henry Street. Maybe he really owned those twin tenements on Henry Street. The blood and the flesh of the people there now, went to stuff his belly.

"Do you own any houses on Henry Street?"

This resembled the questions that Morris Caplan's gayer, more precocious young American lady friends would ask him preparatory to looking him up in Bradstreet. A little resentment and disappointment shot like pebbles through his heart.

"Nu, and if I *have*?" He sat alert.

She covered her face with her hands, seeing his entrails actually stuffed with the marrow of other people. She groaned.

Morris Caplan was startled. He leaned forward to take her hands away from her eyes. She edged away and dropped her hands, and an expression of indisputable resolution came into her face and voice as she said:

"Mr. Caplan, I do not want to marry you. I never will. Please leave me alone. I never want to hear you ask me again." He made a swift move in his chair as if to contradict her, but she added more emphatically: "Now, I never want to see you again if you don't throw that rubbish out of your head. I *won't* marry you. There now!" The last, feeling herself overcome by impotence, she flung out as though to spite him, like a child.

Morris Caplan flushed. He was angry with her. At the same time he was angry with himself for wanting her when she refused him so emphatically. As though charging her with not having carried through a business deal fairly, he told her he had no intention of being cut off from further chances of winning her. He was going to see her again, and again; he would *make* her marry him. It was his policy never to take "no" for an answer.

Minnie rose, telling him, in her turn, that she supposed she had something to say in the matter, too, and choking with impotence, strutted out of the room.

And Morris Caplan was left with a quarrel on his hands, a void in his heart, and a consciousness of the asininity of his behavior. Nevertheless he resented this slip of a girl in a working girls' home. What in the world did he want her for, as if there were not dozens of other girls prettier, from nice homes, who would be mighty glad to have him. Indeed, he would not come to see her again. She could go to—— But how could he

send her there when he wanted—wanted her so badly in his arms?

* * * * *

In the flush of her indignation Minnie went straight to Amelia's room and emptied her whole heart into the other's lap, having had it on her mind, in any event, that Amelia ought to know where Morris Caplan's affections had strayed. She told Amelia everything, ending with: "Now you mustn't blame *me*, Amelia, it's not my fault if he is crazy enough to care for me. I always tried to throw you two together. It makes me sick how everything always comes out upsidedown—and I hate him anyway. He had no right to propose to me."

Had it not been for Minnie's very attitude of defensive, Amelia's suspicions might not have been aroused. Watching Minnie closely, she became convinced that Minnie was masking the truth. Why should Minnie be so indignant about the proposal? Why, indeed, but to throw her, Amelia, off the track, so that later, she, Minnie, could say that she had not wanted to accept Morris—did not Amelia remember?—but that he had insisted. . . . Amelia sighed sarcastically, donned her wisest expression, shrugged her shoulders, and with assumed nonchalance, though her heart beat a tattoo, told Minnie she need not go to all the trouble of masquerading. For her part, she knew how to get along without things; she had had to get along without enough in her life, and her character was not so weak that she did not know how, like a good sport, to hand a man over to a friend.

No expression can be given to the multitude of emotions that swept into poor Minnie's heart and soul as the wise, large-minded Amelia delivered her small sermon. She felt herself being dragged through purgatory, taking

on herself the odor of decomposition, growing sick, faint.

When she reached her own room she fell on her bed in a heap. Amelia's words and Morris Caplan's words hummed and buzzed in her head. She felt like a stranger to herself. A sickening aversion for the Alpha Home came upon her, as if sewage had suddenly been exposed in it. She turned from one side to the other in poisoned restlessness. Her fingertips began to sting and her head to ache.

The following morning she was too ill to go to work and had to keep her bed.

XLVI

On Sunday, in accordance with his promise and plans, Abraham Ratkin came to call on Minnie. He was shocked to see how pale and worn she looked. All his paternal self was roused to protectiveness. That work—that work in the charity place! Hadn't he told her it would have an ill effect, first upon her body, then, as a result, upon her nerves and her spirits? She would soon be taking people to task again and having to-dos. Why, why, couldn't she be amenable to sane advice?

To prove that his prediction of troubles ahead was false, Minnie blurted out the tale of the week's excitements, concluding with her usual "There now!" They had the sitting-room to themselves, and they could talk freely.

Abraham felt himself jerked into an undreamed-of, startling reality, in which, for self-protection, his soul drew closer to the decision that it was time for him to tell Minnie of his love and ask her to become engaged to him. He would promise, he rehearsed mentally, that dur-

ing their engagement he would devote himself to her as her counsellor, guide, and good close friend—and then they would marry.

"You see, Minnie, I told you long ago you ought to drop Mr. Caplan's lessons. You should have taken my advice." Abraham spoke, not in his old scolding way, but in a tender tone of loving admonition.

"Yes, but not because of *that*. You only thought I would have more time to read."

Abraham blinked.

"That, too," he said, "but I could not take the liberty of telling you so plainly."

They lapsed into meditation.

"I wonder when we'll be married," Abraham mused.

It sounded like a clock suddenly beginning to tick—the one-legged clock on the shelf over the sink in Henry Street. "When you be a teacher," Minnie heard herself piping. She saw the rock, the refuse of the air-shaft, as in a vivid dream.

"I love you, Minnie. Isn't it odd that we should be sweethearts after that long separation?"

Sweethearts! She became conscious of Abraham's hands lying spread out on his knees, stubby, with short, blunt fingers. He turned his head at the sound of a step, and for the first time, she observed dark hairs like bristles in the lobes of his ear. Sweethearts! They! It struck her as ludicrous and repellent. She remembered the button in the back of his coat, and experienced an uncanny sensation, as of dampness in the room. . . . He in love with her! *She* was not in love with *him*! The large blond and dark heads of Mr. Grave and Gregory Chernin danced as one before her eyes, their resonant voices rang in her ears. She saw the humorous

gleam of their eyes. Abraham Ratkin's cold calculativeness as compared with Gregory's human warmth whipped upon her heart like a cold wet cloth.

"We cannot be married right away," she heard Abraham saying. "I will prepare myself to take the principals' examination a few years from now. We might have to stay engaged five years. You are young. Twenty-five is just the right age for a girl to be married. And really, Minnie——" he stumbled and added, "dear—you ought to live at home—like a nice, sweet, sensible girl. We will be engaged, and you will find it pleasanter than you used to to be at home, because they always respect an engaged daughter in a Jewish household. We will spend a lot of time together. You will work, and without other distractions you will really concentrate your mind upon the proper reading. Come, like a nice girl."

Abraham Ratkin's arithmetic of life had never left a margin for complications. To him life was a sort of Quaker Matron wearing a neat white cap and apron and smiling beneficent acquiescence upon all his plans. Never, in all his neat mapping out of things, had he allowed for the possible need of removing a single hair from this Quaker Matron's eye to make her see that what he wanted he wanted justifiably, out of pure, good reason.

He leaned forward in his chair, expectant.

A gasp came from Minnie to put his soul in a panic.

"Why, Abraham—I—never—I did not think of marrying you——"

Abraham was taken aback. He flushed and waited before he spoke again.

"Well, of course, you have not *said* it to yourself. It doesn't matter. A fact is a fact."

What in the world did he mean, she wondered. What in the world did all of them mean? Were they all crazy? Abraham—Morris Caplan—Mr. Maloney?

"I don't *want* to marry you!" she said in a raised voice.

Abraham's heart made a leap and landed upside down, causing the world to assume the queerest aspect.

Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, Abraham Ratkin was not conceited. He was simply not lacking in the normal amount of self-confidence. The average man quite naturally expects that the average woman will find him desirable for marriage. As John Maloney so aptly put it, men are not to be found in five-and-ten-cent stores; a fact with which girls of experience are acquainted. And when a young man and a young woman can, moreover, look back upon a childhood affection as a foundation, could a man possibly be more justified in feeling secure? Abraham's heart pounded ridiculously, and there seemed to be unsafe things lurking in the corners of the room. He was overcome with alarm. Bending forward, he said feverishly:

"I—I love you. Surely you love me, too. I can't live without you. Without you——"

"You will have no one to bully," Minnie interjected. Her feelings were at last crystallizing into definite objection. She saw before her the mathematical Abraham, the calculating Abraham, the Abraham who was forever right, who never had a gratifying thing to say to her, who had figured out a five-year engagement between them in order to make her his perfect counterpart, like the porcelain shepherdess that so perfectly matches the porcelain shepherd at the other end of the mantel. Rising, she said in a low voice with concentrated feeling:

"You all make me weary." Abraham made a move to

grasp her hand. Feeling she would break down if she stayed in the room, yet hating herself for her weakness, she jumped up and left.

Abraham's astonishment knew no bounds. But soon he settled down to await her return. He even felt a bit amused at her childishness. At the end of an hour, during which she failed to come back, he left, patching up his spirits with the thought that she was a little stubborn and with the conviction that she would write.

Days passed, yet no letter came and he was just approaching the borderline of fear, when the mail brought a missive in her handwriting.

DEAR ABRAHAM:

I have left the Alpha Home.

MINNIE.

The Alpha Home had become unbearable to Minnie, and, while Abraham's thoughts had been dwelling with her lovingly, she had been meditating escape from everything associated in her mind with the Home. The longing to get away became an obsession, to which she finally yielded, and she engaged a room at the Young Ladies' Lodge, a sort of working-girls' hotel, which aspired to eliminate the characteristics of a philanthropy.

XLVII

"There is no such thing as a universal convention."

Mr. Grave, with a bit of leisure on his hands, was keeping Minnie from her work. Minnie looked as if she did not agree with him. She felt sure there must be one thing in the world to which all people did adhere. But

her geographical experience being as limited as it was, she did not dare pit her opinion against that of her august friend.

Whenever Mr. Grave came into the office to spend time with her, Minnie's heart would go pit-a-pat, and, distracted by the fear that he might detect her agitation, she always had to make the double effort of controlling herself and concentrating her mind upon the way to meet him in conversation.

"Isn't there?" she asked.

"No, of course not; can *you* think of any?"

Mr. Grave was trying to convince her that there was really no right and no wrong, since what was right in one part of the globe was wrong in another; and the same, therefore, held true of individuals. For a beggar it might be right to steal, while for her it might be wrong.

As he seemed to have won the day, she backed water into raillery. It was when making fun that they enjoyed each other the most.

"Well, I should think stupidity at least was a universal convention. For instance, here you sit stupidly forgetting that I am the paid secretary of the Settlement with work to do."

Mr. Grave laughed, then fell into the mood of his own name. She was undertaking too much work, he told her; the former secretary had not worked so hard, and it was unwise to be at it morning, noon, and night.

At the Young Ladies' Lodge time hung heavy on Minnie's hands. She felt lost there. From the Alpha Home she had carried away a strong dislike for making new friends among girls. But at the Settlement, after she had shed her extreme diffidence, she found people drifting to her, and she responded gratefully to the af-

fection that they manifested. She enjoyed her contacts there; so much so, indeed, that almost every evening, after having supped at the Young Ladies' Lodge, she returned to the Settlement, where there was recreation, interesting work, and Mr. Grave, who wafted in and out, like a pleasant breeze. There she would keep herself from brooding about Amelia's tirade, and the, to her, uncanny conduct of Morris Caplan, Abraham Ratkin, and John Maloney, which, when she was alone and unoccupied, always beset her. She could not keep herself from brooding when alone.

At Mr. Grave's advice not to overwork, Minnie dropped her eyes. When he expressed such genuine concern for her, a facetious retort seemed unfair, and yet she could not bring herself to explain to him why she clung to the Settlement. Her eyes grew moist. Unguardedly she looked up at him.

"Well, now," he rolled out, rising from his seat, "we seem to have the blues." He waited a moment and added: "How about theater to-night?"

To theater with Mr. Grave! Minnie thrilled.

"Why, that would be perfectly delightful," she said, successfully hiding her excitement.

After Mr. Grave was gone from the office she unaccountably dissolved in tears. She could not make herself out. At the least provocation now she cried like a sentimental old lady.

* * * * *

Romance! It was a drama of love that set the young a-yearning and kindled sweet memories of long ago in the old. The novelty of an orchestra seat, to be sitting beside the godlike Mr. Grave wrought a spell upon Minnie. There was a glamour over everyone and everything.

Once or twice Mr. Grave's eyes left the stage to rest upon her profile. Observing her expression of almost devout rapture, he was glad he had been the instrument for giving her so much pleasure, and, as though to let her know he was thinking of her, he leaned sidewise so that his shoulder touched hers. A feeling of ecstasy, sharp as a flash of lightning and as brief, shot through Minnie's being. Instinctively she moved away a bit, but he inclined a little further, and for the rest of the act they sat with shoulders touching.

When the curtain dropped, Minnie, trying to feel that there was no reason for self-consciousness, looked up at him and, with an attempt at naturalness, smiled.

"Well, little girl, did you like it?" he rolled out, smiling down on her cordially. Minnie flushed and drew in her chin timidly.

"Oh, yes, it was perfectly lovely." Then, forgetting herself in a gust of enthusiasm, she asked: "Don't you think she's just charming? And he—oh, he makes me think so much of a friend of mine, Gregory Chernin." The actor was dark and tall and slender. "I used to know Gregory when I was a little girl. I met him again the other night. His voice was just like yours." She broke off, self-conscious again.

Mr. Grave was amused by her zest and her childish outburst and enjoyed the sparkle of her eyes. When the curtain went up, he leaned sidewise again. His warm breath grazed her cheek.

"You are as pretty as a flower, and your blue dress makes a lovely vase for you." His deep tone vibrated through Minnie like organ notes. She flushed. Her heart fluttered. The blood pulsed warm through her veins.

There was a new rhythm to the passionate words of love breathed by the ardent, dark-haired lover of the play.

Mr. Grave took Minnie's hand in his. A faintness came over her and a sensation as if the stage had moved miles away; the voices reached her as through a heavy forest in which millions of birds were twittering. She made no attempt to withdraw her hand.

Throughout the rest of the act and on the way home neither felt the desire for words.

Outside the door of the Young Ladies' Lodge Mr. Grave looked down on Minnie as if to probe her soul.

"May I come to see you next Sunday?" he asked.

She hesitated, afraid to trust herself to speech. "Yes," she finally brought out in a low voice, "I should be very glad if you would come."

He was very courteous—perhaps over-courteous—when he bade her good-night.

She dragged up the stairs unsteadily, like one recuperating from an illness. Keeping her room dark, she drew off her clothes slowly. Her mind would not move to a single definite thought. She got into bed. One by one, as fleecy clouds traverse the heavens, thoughts of the evening drifted through her mind, and new, warm sensations wrapped her soul, which was at once mournful and ecstatic. She wanted to cry; she wanted to laugh. She buried her face in her arm. Her hair fell in a chestnut mass over her back. The touch of it thrilled her through and through. She stretched her arms forward, and as if ashamed of the wish that came to her mind she brought them quickly back and clasped them beneath her chin.

"Goodness! I love him!" she cried and gave herself

up to a flow of tears, while her whole being throbbed with a new, strange gladness.

XLVIII

Abraham was at first shocked by Minnie's note, then upon re-reading it, concluded it was not to be taken seriously. He was sure she had written it in one of her unaccountable moods, under the spell of the same perverseness that had taken her from the sitting-room the day of the proposal. Abraham was not of the sort who is easily thwarted in his ambitions, and since he had decided to marry Minnie the insecurity he had experienced was rapidly discarded. He braced himself and went about his duties calmly confident that another letter would soon come. But when two weeks passed and his intuitions were promising to play him false he lost some of his self-assurance and composure. He began to wonder what he ought to do, whether he ought to wait longer or get Minnie's address from Amelia Rubin or the Alpha Home itself. He let another week pass in the hope of a letter; then he became quite troubled. He worked up great annoyance with Minnie. "Just like a senseless child, she makes it necessary for me to track her," he said to himself disgustedly. Yet on Sunday afternoon he started off for the Alpha Home. He would go straight to the superintendent, he decided, though recalling with mortification that she knew him to be a close friend of Minnie's. He could have spanked Minnie.

At the superintendent's office, receiving no response to his rap on the door, he opened it and found a large man seated in a temporary attitude on the edge of a chair.

"Oh, is nobody here?" Abraham exclaimed, entering and letting the door fall shut.

A moment's hesitation and a merry twinkle came into the eyes of the Irishman.

"One feels pretty *much* like a nobody here." His twinkling eyes glanced about the room, and his nose worked like an animal's on a scent. According to John Maloney's standard, the Alpha Home smelt cheap.

Abraham smiled.

"I meant an official."

"Oh, ye saw me, did ye?" Mr. Maloney almost roared. "Well, the official went to fetch me an address."

The door opened, and the superintendent entered.

"It is Mildred Mendel, Young Ladies' Lodge," she read from a slip of paper to Mr. Maloney, who rose from his chair and stood deferentially smiling.

Abraham stared.

Mr. Maloney picked up his hat from his chair, thanked the superintendent graciously, and waddled out. The eyes of the woman followed him with amusement. She turned to Abraham.

"I came for the same," he admitted, feeling so monumentally foolish that he could have shaken Minnie had she been on the spot.

The genial superintendent laughed. Abraham, blushing, mumbled his thanks, and left in pursuit of Mr. Maloney. The paper-box manufacturer must not get there ahead of him. What claims had the Irishman on Minnie anyway? He made a wild dash and overtook Mr. Maloney at the next corner.

"Are you Mr. Maloney?"

"Why, yes," came the reply a little dubiously in the Irishman's deep, generous voice.

Abraham explained that he was an old friend of Minnie's, and had been alarmed because he had not heard from her for three weeks.

They traveled together on their amorous mission, conversing pleasantly, though each in a subterranean region of his being wished the other in Kingdom Come.

To judge by the exterior, the Young Ladies' Lodge was a hotel, while the plainness of the interior offered contradiction. The two men were puzzled as to the correct procedure for locating a dweller in this unclassifiable institution. Finally Mr. Maloney led the way to a counter, behind which sat a girl clerk. While she was gone to announce the callers, Mr. Maloney gazed about the premises, and his far-sighted eyes peered into a remote corner of the sitting-room and alighted upon his former stenographer sitting beside a handsome gentleman.

"By golly!"

Mr. Maloney's exclamation startled his companion competitor, whose gaze, as if drawn by a magnet, traveled to the same remote corner. Simultaneously the two made for the corner of Great Allure, Mr. Maloney calling back to the surprised clerk:

"Never mind. Don't ye bother."

Minnie did not see the two men until they were close by, and then was too dumfounded to give them a proper greeting, much less to introduce them to Mr. Grave, who had risen with her and stood nonplussed and amused by the sudden manifestations of extreme embarrassment in the heroine of the occasion. She was flushing scarlet to the roots of her hair.

"Why—Mr. Ma—— Why, Abraham—how did you find——" She put her hand to the back of her head, which had begun to ache.

Mr. Maloney enjoyed her confusion and let out his roar.

At last she got over with the introductions. In an agony that Mr. Grave might consider her clumsy, ill-mannered, ill-bred, she asked them all to be seated.

As for Abraham Ratkin, never in his life had he undergone such a shrinkage of his importance. One of three! Minnie seemed to be skating away from him on ice while he was unequipped to pursue. Mrs. Ratkin's gentle son was ready to blast his two rival suitors. However, giving no evidence of his will to murder, he asked Minnie quite quietly whether she knew how much worry she had caused him by her silence.

Minnie was so nervous and uncomfortable, wondering how Mr. Grave was affected by the intrusion, whether he noticed that Abraham spoke with a Yiddish intonation, while Mr. Maloney said "a" instead of "of" and "ye" instead of "you," that she feared she would break down under the ordeal. At Abraham's words, she started nervously.

"I didn't think about it," she answered hastily, looking away.

She realized she had to make a desperate effort to pull herself together. Like a person in imminent danger, she gauged her plight and sought the nearest refuge—persiflage. Turning to Mr. Maloney, she asked, with the friskiness he loved, whether he had changed his religion since she had seen him last or whether he was still hobnobbing with the Pope. She knew Mr. Maloney was an atheist and would not take offense.

As it happened, Mr. Maloney had that morning, for the sake of a novel experience, visited a Christian Science Church. "It may do ye good to learn," he said, "that in the eyes of the Christian Scientists, I am God's perfect

child. Did ye ever know that I am perfect?" he roared.

"No," Minnie laughed, "but why did you have to go to *others* to tell you so when you could have told it to yourself so much more sincerely?"

The men laughed, and Minnie was about to ask Mr. Maloney what other convenient dogmas he had carried away, when Mr. Grave sent a chill through her by asking if either of the two gentlemen had seen *Romance*. It was as if he were giving his and her dearest secret away.

"Why do you want to know?" She interrupted, addressing Mr. Grave. "Mr. Maloney's heart is wrapped up in paper boxes through which romance can't possibly penetrate, and Mr. Ratkin employs a whole police force of logic and reason to safeguard *him*." They laughed again and the two accused felt like both shaking and hugging her.

The afternoon wore on slowly for Minnie. Her head ached beyond endurance, and when the three men observing her fatigue offered, one promptly after the other to leave, her relief was immense. Each was disappointed with her ready acquiescence.

On his homeward way Mr. Maloney went off into a cigar-smoke revery, in which he saw Minnie in his fine home sitting on his knee prattling, laughing, cutting up stunts. The picture faded into the tantalizing realization that she was a young girl, with young "fellers" dangling after her. He felt his middle age more than ever and cursed his superfluous avoirdupois. He decided he might as well step out of the game.

Abraham went home irritated with this nonsense of Minnie's holding off, and he resolved upon another and immediate visit when he would make a quick end of matters.

As for Mr. Grave, he fell to thinking of a tennis-playing, horseback-riding Gibson girl in the West to whom he was engaged.

XLIX

The bands business was coming to nothing.

Leopold and Sarah could no longer close their eyes to the disaster staring them in the face. Mrs. Tannenbaum had reached the end of her imagination for advice. The Mira Cohen woman, she said, had given up bands long before and was making money in other kinds of millinery; but, then, of course, Mira Cohen had relatives in Boston.

They considered projects for a new business, but the hardships connected with such a move at their time of life seemed insurmountable, and they deluded themselves into momentary cheerfulness with the hope that hat styles might, after all, change and bands become fashionable again. For Sarah their consultations always ended in helpless despair, while Leopold regularly reverted in his mind to a scheme which he hesitated to impart to Sarah.

At the end of a week in which not a single dollar had been taken in, he plucked up courage and spoke.

"Sarah," he said, "the girls are grown-up and self-supporting. How would it be for us to make a change altogether?"

"A change altogether? How? What do you mean?"

Leopold ran his fingers through his graying hair. Sarah's eyes followed the movement, and a pang shot through her. Not so long ago she and Leopold had been young lovers; now she, too, was gray. Life was a chain of gray circumstances.

"I have been thinking for a long time that we could

just drop everything here and go to South Africa. It's easier to start something new in a new place than in an old place."

Sarah was somehow not surprised, as if she had expected this very suggestion. She was in that state of dejection in which nothing startles. In an instant she took in the full significance of the suggestion. She lowered her head and made no reply. Her heart filled with a blank mournfulness at the prospect of going to new surroundings, away from everything and everybody familiar. In her weary brain there rose a vision of her Jacob grown to large manhood, and Ida and Beckie to womanhood. To leave them behind! She saw Minnie as she had looked the night of the graduation. . . . Sarah's mother heart was torn with anguish.

Leopold continued rather ruefully:

"We are growing older. A new business here might not be successful, we might lose our money. *Then* what?" He raised his eyes to hers. "I don't know how you feel about it, but I would not like to become dependent upon the children."

Dependent! Sarah was startled out of her mood. She would rather die, she cried, than be dependent upon anybody, whether children, mother, brother, father, even husband. In an access of vigor she rose from her seat and went about small tasks.

Neither spoke for a long while. Leopold broke the silence to say he had to go out, and urged her gently to consider the South African proposition seriously.

"But it will cost a great deal to get there. What if we should not be successful?"

Leopold assured her there was no reason why they should not be successful, since a small investment in any

business in South Africa would yield them a living, and all they needed for their few remaining years was simply a living, respectable independence.

They smiled wistfully, and Sarah, before he went out, promised to think it over. She went about her tasks slowly and preoccupied. For a long time past, life, for all its other stress, had at least been free from economic worry, and she wondered wherein she and Leopold had so sinned that the very business they had chosen should decline. Here her mind rested as if to absorb the fact that things were really as bad as they thought. It seemed impossible that their circumstances had come to a pass that necessitated their contemplating so drastic a step as migration to a remote corner of the earth, away from everything and everybody they knew. A harrowing sense of loneliness and despair overcame her, and in an effort to save herself she clutched at the thought that other mothers *did* allow themselves to be supported by their children quite naturally. But this she could not contemplate. "Not for me, not for me!" she cried to herself and hurried on with her work.

L

Abraham came again to call on Minnie the Wednesday after the visit of the three. Without any preliminaries he launched upon the subject of his proposal, and in almost a single breath begged her to discard trifling, to think and speak soberly, and to bear in mind the seriousness of the matter.

"But Abraham, I have told you how I feel," she protested.

"You have not even given the matter consideration.

How then can I accept anything you say as your decision?"

"But I don't *love* you. People don't have to think whether they are in love or not." Minnie felt a hysterical determination to have the matter over with, and not to allow his apparent reasonableness to reduce her, as it always had, to impotence.

Abraham flushed and stared at her. He had a sinking sensation. He felt adrift as though landmarks had suddenly been removed. His unnatural flush was succeeded by a still more unnatural pallor. Minnie was genuinely pained.

"Abraham, I'm awfully sorry. I really am. I wouldn't hurt you or anybody for the world. But what can I do? I don't love you." The tears were in her eyes and voice. Abraham felt himself suspended in mid-air. There are some people who are never prepared for a disturbance of their serenity. They live in a peculiar security of belief that while evil may befall others, they themselves will always be immune.

Abraham, unable to look the future now threatening in the face, abandoned himself to passionate pleading.

"Minnie dear, you don't mean you have seriously decided not to marry me? Take time to think. I will be good to you. I would sacrifice my life for you. You are alone and need someone to be devoted to you. What would I not do for you! You are dearer to me than my own life." He took her hand in his.

Pity and then aversion swept over Minnie, like a wind that leaves behind a trail of dust.

"Abraham, please—— Oh, Abraham, I can't. I don't feel well. Please don't excite me."

She began to cry. Abraham, agonized, released her

hands, but still continued to plead, leaning eagerly forward in his chair.

"Won't you take time to think about it?" he asked, his voice quivering.

Minnie wiped her eyes.

"Abraham, I haven't been feeling well. I get such headaches and palpitations. Please don't upset me so. I am sorry for you but I am not happy myself either. I can't bear to make you so miserable."

He sat helpless for a moment; then, becoming mindful of the virtue of self-forgetfulness in the face of distress, he urged her to calm herself, assuring her he had not meant to upset her so and impressing upon her that if she was not well, she ought to go to a doctor. He soon rose to go.

When the front door closed on Abraham, Minnie stood in the hall utterly numb, in a state of mental collapse. A ruthless hand was drawing and twisting her vitals. She could not have told how she got upstairs and into bed. And bed was no relief, nor was it a relief to close her burning lids. The thoughts came crowding; every detail of the evening was a separate torment, every word of Abraham's pleading, her own answers, her tears. She had cried again. She was thoroughly mortified; she had no patience with this new thing—her facile overflows. The whole scene had been obnoxious, Abraham's part in it, her own part in it. Somehow it should not have occurred. And Mr. Maloney's proposal and Morris Caplan's two proposals should not have occurred. Each detail of *these* events became a separate torment. She felt as if it would never be possible for her to stop her thoughts, as if she had to submit to them as to a hard master. And she was so tired, so dreadfully, so unnaturally, so unmercifully tired! . . . "You ought to go to

a doctor," sounded Abraham's voice. Abraham was so earnest, so whole-souled, so trustworthy, good as gold—her pal of Henry Street. He needed her to make him happy. She felt mean and worthless to inflict suffering upon him instead. A deep longing for the power to love him—to make him happy—possessed her. But she remained cold. . . . With sudden passion, feeling hopelessly abandoned, lonely, she cried to herself: "Oh, if only I had someone to tell it all to—someone——" A hard-hearted mother standing over an over-worked little Beckie flitted before her closed eyes.

The rising bell clanged upon a deep sleep which had not come until morning. Minnie dressed with a heart palpitating from the shock of the awakening; the comb fell from her hands; she fumbled with her shoe laces; dressing seemed to be an endless, insurmountable difficulty. She left the breakfast table for work without a mouthful of food; she could not swallow even a cup of coffee.

* * * * * *

For days Abraham was the most wretched lover that has ever found himself spurned. He hated the food he ate, his daily routine, the voice and the sight of his mother, whose design it had been to bring this very misery upon him.

Each succeeding visit to Minnie only drove a new nail into the coffin of his hopes. She remained unshaken. The fact that Minnie Mendel, his playmate of Henry Street, was unwilling to be his wife, finally struck him as unalterable, and a pall of gloom settled upon his heart. His step became heavy as a middle-aged man's; his spirits crumpled up like a dried plant.

To add to his unhappiness he began to suffer the pangs of jealousy. Minnie, it had become evident to him, was in love with Mr. Grave. On his regular Sunday visits he invariably met the delightful gentleman in her company. When Abraham would observe her flush and quiver under Mr. Grave's gaze or touch or praise, it took every bit of his self-control not to evince the concern he felt on her account—yes, he assured himself, wholly on her account. Very obviously Mr. Grave was not in love with Minnie, and in any circumstances the affair was objectionable because Mr. Grave was a Gentile. Abraham was very Jewish in his feelings. He believed so much in the individuality of his people that he gave his support to the Zionist movement, which has for its program the re-establishment of Palestine as a Jewish homeland. The time came when he could no longer maintain silence. He warned Minnie. To fall in love, he said, with a man to whom she was so obviously only a pastime was quixotic.

Minnie turned pale, bit her lips, suppressed the resentment that rose in her heart, and told him with dignity that it was her own private affair, and he was taking a liberty in giving her unsolicited advice.

Abraham's warning, however, had its effect upon Minnie. Thereafter she carefully weighed Mr. Grave's attentions, placing her own feelings in the balance. Each time he left the office with the least show of haste, her heart stood still in an agony of doubt. If he loved her, she reasoned, he would never for any reason be in a hurry to leave her. She would watch for his smile of approval as a mother watches for the smile of an ailing child, and if a Sunday passed on which he did not come to see her, the whole world was wrapped in gloom. When they were alone together, she would tremble with the anticipation of his love avowal, tortured all the while by the sound of

Abraham's voice telling her mockingly that she was only a pastime.

She began to look pale and pinched and to act so mirthlessly that Abraham, whose kind heart was torn to its core, took his courage in his hands once more, and, prepared for any sacrifice of Minnie's good-will, warned her a second time, on this occasion going the full length of explicitness. It was obvious, he said, that Mr. Grave enjoyed her company, but so far as marriage was concerned, his mind was as remote from it as from the Pacific Ocean.

Minnie turned upon him like a tigress.

"You take the liberties of a relative," she burst out. "If you had the least delicacy of feeling, you would keep quiet. I hate you. Please don't ever come to see me again." They were out walking and she quit him then and there to rush back to the Young Ladies' Lodge, where she threw herself on her bed, her soul writhing in an agony of doubt. Every little thing Mr. Grave had ever done to indicate liking rather than love rose to torture her.

As for poor Abraham, he returned home an even sadder man. The night held no sleep for him, and in the morning he poured out his full heart on paper. When he posted the letter to Minnie, a hope like a fervent prayer rose within him that his written word at least might reach her soul.

DEAREST MINNIE:

The psychological steps resulting in action take place in the following order: thinking, feeling, willing, acting. In a strong mind all these processes are strong; in a weak mind they are weak. Therefore, after reading the tale of woe I hereby relate, betraying my strong feeling, do not condemn me as a weakling. I am far from being that.

Neither should you convict me as being filled with great passion. You well know how my conduct toward you is absolutely free from anything passionate, not because I am a prude, but partly because I respect you and know you would not tolerate anything material and, above all, because my training has put my passions under my control, so that I must make an effort to yield to them. All moral people are that way.

Nor can you call me a boy. My training has made me mentally older than my years, and the preliminary economic struggle, of which you know much yourself, has broadened my mind more than the average young man's of my age. I deprecate self-laudation, but I have friends older than myself who, I know, are fond of me.

Finally, Minnie, do not think I am excited. I can prove my sanity even now on the question under discussion, even on the two individuals under consideration. I proposed to you after mature deliberation, for I had thought about it long before you ever suspected. When I met you while I was still at college, I loved you, and you seemed unable to believe that I really meant it. Then, later, you assured me that I did not mean it, even if I thought so, for if I did, I could not find so much fault with you. Oh, Minnie, it is because I love you that I want to exert a good influence over you. I have been waiting patiently for you to come to this understanding, but, instead, you seem to be turning to other men who do not criticize you, thinking that by this they prove that they have greater regard for you. It is not so.

I do not know how to write poetically. I have not read enough novels to have learned the tactics of winning a woman's heart. I must confine myself to the truth in my own crude way. But I am sure you will recognize it as the truth. The Talmud says: "Words that leave the heart enter the heart."

Please do not consider the following a flattery of myself. You must admit that it is an accurate analysis of your mind. You cannot stand injustice. I have tried to make you believe that this quality is Judaic, and you have interpreted me as being narrow-minded, as desiring to influence you against association with Gentiles. I have tried to make you see that the work that you are spending your strength on now,

like your promiscuous attempts to make converts to a misconceived Socialism before, is a waste of time. The work you are doing now is good enough for the men and women who see conditions only on the surface. For real thinking men and women the trouble lies too deep to be cured by such a mild measure. For trying to exercise my influence upon you, I have gained only your displeasure; but if it has also jeopardized my chances for ever gaining your love, then you have allowed yourself to feel too great displeasure to be fair to me.

Oh, Minnie, I love you so! I love you with every bit of myself, with every throb of my heart. In these months of uncertainty let me tell you how I have spent my time. It was much like years ago when I was a boy and had a toothache. I would long for the day at night and for the night by day, in the hope of getting relief. So it has been these months. I have longed one day for the next in the hope of getting some encouragement from you. When the uncertainty of my future dawns upon me, when I think of having to live without you my skin quivers, my eyes fill with tears, and I must perforce think of something else. I wish I could invoke the aid of Shakespeare's analytical mind and Milton's muses to describe to you my suffering. I have not read a single page of anything in weeks, although I sit for hours at my books. I loathe the very food that is set before me. I am miserable without you. The world looks so uninteresting and so hollow with all the room for charity! Tears roll down my cheeks as I write now. I shudder at the wretched life that I may have to live.

The Talmud says: "Forty days before the birth of the infant, a voice from heaven proclaims: 'The son of this man for the daughter of this man.'" Oh, Minnie, I feel that we two were destined for each other. Can you think of Henry Street and feel otherwise? Why, Minnie, don't you remember the lunch hour we spent in the air-shaft when the refuse came down on our heads, and the afternoon we spent afterwards in Rutgers Street Park?

Even if I try to direct you, with me you would live the free life of a bird, for I believe in the freedom of women. Your life with me would be replete with real joys and real pains—even a

bird has pains. What man or woman understands you better than I do? None. Oh, Minnie, I feel our souls are counterparts of each other; fused together they would form a living symphony.

And does the thought ever occur to you that you would discard Abraham for a broader-minded man? (I hereby affirm that I have no individual in mind.) [Can it be that Abraham was not thinking here of Mr. Grave?] How unjust! Minnie, you who want and strive to be so just, can you feel about me that I am narrow-minded because I do not approve of everything you do and say? You cannot condemn me so and discard me! Our souls are too tightly entwined in each other's. You have been my biggest influence all the years. Have I not been any influence in *your* life at all? If you should tear yourself away from me a part of you would ever be with me. No man can have you complete. Oh, Minnie!

Now I suffer. I am miserable. But at times I am hopeful. Should that hope be shattered I will live always a hollow existence, my strong sense of duty keeping my body up.

You may do what you like—live away from your family, quarrel with them, continue in your Settlement work, you may burn, kill, steal—I will love you. My love for you is as much a fact as the sun. I hereby state that I would sacrifice my honor for you. Thinking people agree that this and this only is true love.

Dearest Minnie, say yes!

Dearest Minnie, say yes!

The man whose life you are,

ABRAHAM.

LI

At sight of the thick letter lying on her desk in the Settlement the next morning, Minnie fell into a nervous tremor; she could scarcely tear the envelope open. But she read her lover's outpouring from beginning to end.

She went about her work dully, under the shock of the first realization of Abraham's intensity of feeling. It dragged on her like a load. She could not cope with it; she could not meet his ardor with even the feeblest glow. To be unresponsive to such love seemed to indicate a meanness in herself. Abraham was good, he deserved her love. She had been hard. With her mind, of course, she had taken in that he, well—not exactly that he loved her—his feelings had never impressed her as love. Now she was moved profoundly. But what could she do? She chided herself endlessly for her unresponsiveness. Her sense of guilt was making her wretched.

At lunch hour she read the letter over again. Paragraphs struck her that had been overshadowed in the first reading. Abraham wrote that if she listened to an inner voice, she would hear that she loved him. As if she were superficial! Abraham always acted as though he knew her inner feelings better than she did herself. And there he was saying again that Mr. Grave had no regard for her. So she construed: "You seem to be turning to other men who do not criticize you, thinking that they thereby prove they have greater regard for you." And upon this thought, that Mr. Grave had no regard for her, her mind dwelt persistently until, in her sensitiveness, the two short lines were trumpeting: "You are nothing but an insignificant little Jew girl from the dirty East Side with a charity record behind you; a mere nobody even yet—in a working-girls' home."

"Hello, girlie!" called Mr. Grave from the threshold. "How are you? There's so much work waiting for me upstairs that I haven't the time even to talk about the weather."

Mr. Grave made no reference to a thick letter from

the West in his breast-pocket, which he was hurrying up to his room to read.

After he disappeared, Minnie kept staring into the hall to retain the mental vision of his elastic figure bounding up the stairs. She felt tremulously in need of him—of the greater perfection he stood for. The next morning Abraham was marvelling at her cruelty. She had written him a short, cold letter.

LII

Abraham, who had resigned himself to a period of waiting, during which he trusted circumstances would right themselves, continued to visit Minnie, though he sedulously refrained from speaking his mind, even when he felt that doing so would hasten her restoration to sanity.

As for Mr. Grave, he kept up his rainbow appearances in Minnie's sky, leaving behind sunshine or clouds, according to the degree of his friendliness. His manner was so unfailingly affable and he showed, on the whole, so much pleasure in her company even when he remained only a moment or two that by degrees the effect of Abraham's comments almost wore off.

But her health began to suffer. She lost her appetite, and slept poorly, and always felt fagged. In addition Ida and Beckie brought distressing news of the business and the South African project. Within a short time a vast amount of maturity seemed to settle upon Minnie. She brooded over her mother's hard lot and charged herself with having contributed to it. She impressed herself now as having been the intolerant one, the peace disturber. Everything would have been different, she im-

aged self-accusingly, had she not left home. Often it tortured her that she might have gone to college and developed into a person whom Mr. Grave could look upon as fit for him, while her own love sufferings made her regard her mother's marriage as quite a natural thing and gave her a sense of guilt toward Leopold. For Abraham she felt a new kindness and warmth; her manner became more patient, her every act gentler. Her thoughts went back penitently to Morris Caplan, to the peremptoriness with which she had dismissed him, and she had intermittent impulses to write and tell him she regretted her harshness. And now and then a feeling of moral responsibility toward Louis "the painter" stabbed her soul. She seemed to have been drawn out of herself into a world of others.

* * * * *

No sooner had Sarah consented to the South African plan than she was assailed by a brood of ominous fears. The parting framed itself in her mind as a definite one for all time. She would never return, never see her children again. Inevitably regrets began to stir in her breast. She blamed herself unreservedly for not having hunted Minnie up as soon as the child left home. Though she dreaded making the admission to her own soul, she believed superstitiously that this new visitation was the chastisement for her conduct, and pictured herself in all sorts of attitudes, begging Minnie to forgive her. Often she retired into privacy to wring her hands and sob out her grief.

During the weeks that Sarah had held off without making up her mind regarding South Africa Leopold had waited eagerly for her assent, so that his first reaction when she gave it was relief; but as he began to visualize

the possible course of their life in South Africa, he recalled that his previous sojourn there had not been exactly "golden," and came to the conclusion, after much thought, that it would be wiser for him to go alone and if he found conditions favorable, send for Sarah afterward. He told Sarah so. She stared at him as if he had slapped her, undergoing the agonies of the deserted wife—deserted, she wailed inwardly, because her bands business was no longer her alluring partner. Leopold surmised what was going on in her mind. He took her in his arms.

"My dear," he said, "you are more precious to me than ever. Don't think with this trouble upon us both I would desert you." He stooped and kissed her. She began to weep. "I want to go ahead because I think it will be safer. I do not want you to go to hardships. Upon my honor as a man, I will let you know the moment I can whether it is safe for you to come, and if it is not I will come right back to you. We will suffer together, not apart."

They embraced and wept silently.

Soon afterwards Leopold decided upon the date of his sailing and bought his ticket.

The household became enveloped in gloom. Even the girls, who by now had become accustomed to Leopold and his ways, and in whose heart he had found a place, were saddened by the approaching departure. In this period he treated them with an even more marked paternal kindness and gentleness than he had been showing since the business had begun to decline and his hair to turn gray. When they returned from visits to Minnie, he would listen to what they had to say of her with an interest he had never before shown. Once or twice he

found Sarah watching him intently and dropped his eyes, wondering whether she guessed that he was feeling remorseful and that he wished now more than ever that Minnie had not spurned the home.

One night, not long before the day of his leaving, Sarah asked him diffidently whether he would consent to go to the Settlement with her to say good-by to Minnie. With some impatience, somehow anxious to hide his true feelings, he declined, though the jerk of his shoulders and his overemphasis revealed to his wife his real wish in the matter—that Minnie should come to him.

All night Sarah tossed from side to side, hardly daring to formulate the plan that burned within her. In the morning she braced herself to the execution of it. As soon as Leopold and the girls left the house, she donned her street clothes and made for the Academy Settlement. If Leopold would not go to Minnie, she would bring Minnie to him.

Strong as was her resolution, she was dragged back by doubts and fears as to how Minnie would receive her. She stopped time and again on the street to draw a deep breath. Her spirit was faint. Her very soul seemed to be graying. When she reached the building, she looked about cautiously as if in dread of an attack, then entered the vestibule, where she stood a moment or two shifting her weight from one foot to the other. A man entered and she inquired timidly for the office. "At the head of the stairs." She waited for the man to disappear before she plodded up the steep flight.

The office door was closed. Sarah stood outside grasping the knob nervously, fearful of turning it. It moved a little, and she started. Her upper lip twitched incessantly. Her short black jacket and black skirt, sagging

in the back, accentuated the forlornness of her figure. A few strands of hair escaped from under her hat and lay along the side of her cheeks. Her lips were blue, and her face, though pale, looked heated. Small beads of perspiration stood out on her forehead. Whenever she thought she heard footsteps she would look about the hall cautiously and bring a sickly smile to her face, thinking her smile would make the object of her presence less obvious.

"God in heaven, will she chase me out? Will she chase me out?" her heart cried. The lines on her face would have made a stone weep with sympathy.

At last she gained the courage to open the door partially, but instantly let it fall shut again.

Minnie, who was alone in the office and was attracted by the mysterious swinging of the door, was too preoccupied, however, to rise and investigate.

"Minnie! Minnele!" Sarah wailed behind the closed door, wringing her hands. She took a deep breath, and ventured to open the door again, a little wider. She controlled the workings of her face to frame a smile, though the tears streamed down her cheeks, and thrust her head in a little way.

Minnie's eyes met her mother's. Sarah opened the door still farther, exposing her full front. Minnie rose from her chair and stared, actually believing that she beheld an apparition.

Sarah entered quickly, letting the door fall shut behind her.

"What's the matter, mama?" cried Minnie, rushing to her, for Sarah looked ghastly.

Sarah gulped. Unable to bring out a word, she broke down in a fit of weeping. Minnie stood helplessly at her

side for a moment or two, possessed by that sense of unreality in which people can do things altogether alien to them. In all the periods of brooding about her mother, Minnie had never thought of reconciliation, and now she took her in her arms and kissed and petted her and talked caressingly.

"Don't cry, mama. Come and sit down. Don't cry, mama." She led Sarah to a chair. She removed her hat and put the loose strands of hair in place, her heart aching at their grayness. Minnie bent over her, put her arms about Sarah's shoulders and laid her head against hers. "Mama, don't cry. Why are you crying?" Then, waiting by Sarah's side, she stood silent, helpless, pale and trembling.

It was fully ten minutes before Sarah could master herself. Then she asked Minnie to sit down and wanted to know if there was any objection to her being there, if she was taking Minnie's time against the rules of the institution. Minnie, eager to put her mother at ease, reassured her with feigned sprightliness.

At last Sarah spoke of the purpose of her coming.

"Your uncle," she said, "is going to South Africa. It is a long way and you may never see him again. If anyone was at fault for the past, I was more to blame than he. God forgives, too. Come and say good-by to him and let him sail with a glad heart. He loves you. It will make me happy, too."

The sight of a proud person humbled in repentance is keen misery. Minnie suffered at seeing her mother so reduced. It was too much for her in her overwrought condition. A great faintness was stealing upon her; she made a prodigious effort not to succumb and said huskily

that she herself had been to blame; she had been too young to know better.

The two were silent, struggling to conquer a multitude of emotions.

Voices sounded in the hall, and Minnie, thinking she heard Dr. Evangel and not wanting him to find her idle, hurriedly assured Sarah that she would come that very evening. Sarah, assuming that Minnie wanted her to leave, rose, but the voices receded, and Minnie, who feared that she might have appeared anxious for her mother to leave and have hurt her feelings, urged her to stay, and mustered up a fictitious vivacity. She chatted about all her affairs, her proposals of marriage, her lovely position, and, finally, to enliven Sarah particularly, told of Chayim Schlopoborsky, upon whom, she remembered clearly, Sarah had many a time wished ill luck. Now was the moment when she could have her satisfaction. To Minnie's surprise, however, Sarah only looked away and muttered mournfully:

"Poor man! Poor, poor man!"

What had changed her mother so? Minnie wondered sadly.

"My dear child," Sarah broke out after a pause, "Mr. Caplan is a rich man; you are a poor, homeless girl, and you are not very strong. You were in the Helina Heimath once. Look how pale and thin you are. All you need is a few years of hard work and what is to prevent you from landing there a second time? You should think carefully before you throw such a chance over." The mother sighed and wiped her eyes. A feeling of ill omen shot through Minnie, followed by an almost overpowering faintness. She had a flitting wish that her mother would leave. Simultaneously Sarah rose saying

that she had better go. Minnie accompanied her to the door, where Sarah made her reiterate her promise to visit them that very evening. She kissed her daughter and left.

Before Minnie had time to overcome the effects of the momentous visit, Mr. Grave came skipping up the stairs and bounded into the office. Minnie stared at him unseeingly. Mr. Grave, who had no eyes for the girl's startling pallor, cried happily:

"Say, Miss Friskie, what do you think? The best girl in the world is coming this afternoon." He took a telegram from his pocket. "It's a great surprise to me. She's coming—Marjorie Bell—we're engaged, you know." He fairly danced about the room.

The ground slipped from beneath Minnie's feet, something whirled round and round in her brain. Then everything became a big black blur.

She found herself in bed at the Young Ladies' Lodge. It was the day after her promised visit home.

LIII

When at half-past eight Minnie had not yet come, Sarah, a little worried, said to Leopold: "Maybe she is detained in the office." By nine o'clock she felt very uncomfortable and maintained silence. By half-past nine a horrid suspicion possessed her—a suspicion that her daughter had only pretended friendliness and had lied when she had said she would come. She kept her eyes averted from Leopold's and started at every sound in the hall. At half-past ten she turned to Leopold in a frenzy of indignation, and cried: "Did you ever meet with such

confounded duplicity in your life?" Leopold, full of pity for his wife, turned away and said nothing.

Four days later, a few hours after Leopold had embarked for South Africa, a postal card came from Minnie, purposely couched in the past tense in order to spare her mother worry, explaining that she had been ill and saying she hoped to visit them in a few days. As Sarah had told Minnie just when Leopold would sail, the girl's apparent evasiveness incensed her so that she tore the card into bits and flung it from her as though it were a reptile.

After this Minnie's name might not be mentioned in the household; Ida certainly, and even Beckie, were imbued with their mother's sense of outrage. Ida took it upon herself to write Minnie a note telling her that they were "on" to her tricks.

It had taken much effort for Minnie to shake off her torpidity and write the card. After it was despatched she lay back in bed wondering who of the family would come to see her. The next day the letter in Ida's handwriting was brought to her; for no definite reason the sight of it filled her with misgivings. Everything now, voices, footsteps, the faintest sounds set her heart galloping.

She took in the contents of the letter in a blurred sort of way, for after the first sentence or two her mind seemed to stop functioning. She read it again. Each word stung, tore, cut. . . . She let it drop from her hands and fell in a heap upon the bed weeping and moaning until she was exhausted. . . . When she recovered herself, she did as Sarah had done with her card; tore the letter into tiny pieces and flung it from her as though it were a reptile. They were a nasty, suspicious lot; she

would never in her life have anything more to do with them.

As the next few days brought no change in her condition, she sent word to Ella Liebman, who, in turn, sent word to Abraham, and the two consulted with the physician. His diagnosis was "nervous prostration." By their prompt endeavors Minnie was despatched to a New Jersey hill, where diversion, rest, fresh air, good food were to work her recovery.

* * * * *

For weeks Minnie lay unable to exert herself. She would wonder and wonder, as her mother long ago had wondered about Elias, how she had become so ill when it seemed as if she had felt well only the day before her collapse. She had forgotten how for weeks she had dragged herself around and had hidden her exhaustion beneath chatter and laughter. We always reach the end of our tether unexpectedly.

She was so tremulous now, so constantly beset by fears and worries! She hated herself for being afraid of the least little thing. Her heart pounded at the sight of anyone and anything; the prospect of disapproval sent her into a veritable panic, destroyed completely every vestige of her self-confidence and foolishly magnified the might of others. She was full of weakness and meekness, both of which she resented as if with another self, a stronger and yet an ineffective self. And how the thought of an unpleasant letter made her tremble!

Her friends thought, wrongly, that she was brooding over Mr. Grave. The fact was, he had been dispelled from her mind as by a magic wand. She seemed even to lack the power to think of him.

"Then what do you think about all the time while you

lie silent with your forehead wrinkled?" Abraham would ask.

"Nothing especially. I am so tired all the time."

She would have told him, had she thought he **could** understand, of fears that stole upon her with the slimy wariness of a burglar in the night, how she struggled against them furiously as if in defense of her life. She would have told him of moods of foamy lightness, different from the light moods of before; they always held a diabolic threat, the threat of bursting like bubbles and scattering fears—fears——

She feared death—she feared a mean letter—she feared a scolding. Fear held her in a relentless grip. If her breath came short she would grow rigid, and wait transfixed, for the awful horror, death, to descend upon her. When her breath came normally again, she would laugh at herself and reason against her foolishness; she would say to herself, sanely enough, that death was the common fate of all and it mattered little whether it came to-day or later. But did her breath come short again, her reason was trampled under foot, and fear rode over her heart in ruthless disregard of her sanity, torturing her so that only by the mightiest will did she hold from shrieking for help. A maniac desire would possess her to run the full length of the universe out of reach of the horrible demon, death. She would have wished to strike out against it with the giant might of a beast. . . . And when the inward struggle was over, she would lie, her face pale, her energy spent, her eyes red-rimmed and tearful, her soul limp.

The agonies of the damned must be mild in comparison with the mental torments of the patrons of that commonly supposed pseudo-illness, nervous prostration.

Abraham Ratkin, who promptly proceeded to supply himself with a store of information on the subject of nervous breakdowns, arrived at the generally accepted theory that distractions and activity should be forced upon the patient.

"I don't feel like walking now."

"But you *must*."

Tearful, tired, Minnie, outwardly acquiescent, would get up and walk until too exhausted to go farther.

"You have no will power."

In the early stages of the illness when Abraham made this charge, she would be crushed with the absurd dread that he might—yes, strike her; and though she knew it was absurd, she would cower pitifully, gulp and choke and remain silent, struggling against another terror—that she might shriek out loud and so betray her insanity.

But later, when a little of her strength came back, she attempted refutations.

"You think I am sick from sheer stubbornness."

"No, I think everything depends upon exerting will power. If you would make up your mind that you are well, you would be well."

"But maybe the reason I can't make up my mind is because I am sick."

"You seem to know more than eminent physicians."

"I am having the experience and am not exactly an idiot. Even a dumb animal knows when he feels sick; why shouldn't I?"

So their conversations would always end in mutual disapproval.

Abraham, who now had no rivals in devotion to Minnie, felt entitled to the veritable obedience that husbands may exact. When he found Minnie holding to her own

way in spite of her weakness, it was as if ice drippings were trickling down on his heart.

Minnie, for her part, after their altercations, was left regretfully brooding over her part in them. She ought to take his false charges in silence, for who else was devoted to her? And he surely meant it all for her good. He was so kind. She felt an ungrateful wretch. He was the only one, except now and then Ella Liebman, who ever came to see her. Some of the Settlement folks had at first sent cards and letters. Even these had now ceased. How meaningless their friendliness had been; they had not sincerely cared for her. How right Abraham had been about this and about Mr. Grave, too. Mr. Grave had not been a friend in earnest. She had simply amused him. Now that she was sick, he was over and done with her and someone else was amusing him. He had sent her a letter, and there his concern had ended. . . . Abraham came every week to see her; he worried and scurried for her; he was a real friend. Even if he was wrong about some things, he was sincere and earnest and dependable. She was filled with solemn appreciation, the solemn appreciation of goodness that comes to the older, battered ones of the world. At his next visit, she determined, she would make an outward show of appreciation.

At one time during Minnie's illness, when he had felt that others beside himself ought to be concerned about her, Abraham had suggested that she call upon her family. She had flared up resentfully. Now her mildness of manner lasting through several visits, emboldened him to mention the matter again, as it had become a fixed idea of his that the best time for a reconciliation was while she was ill.

"You really ought to make up with your people, Minnie," he insisted. "They merely misunderstood you."

This was too much. In spite of Minnie's supreme efforts at self-control, her rebellious feelings triumphed.

"Don't you realize," she burst out, "that they suspected me of deceiving them? And don't you realize the brutality of Ida's letter? I never, never want to have anything to do with them again."

Hardly were the words out of her mouth when repentance set in again. She had meant *always* to be agreeable to her good friend.

Abraham frowned. His heart, tired and tried, responded to nothing in the girl but her sad incorrigibility.

They sat silent for a long while, Abraham wondering with misgivings how it would be to have on his hands the rest of his days a wife like Minnie, stubborn, with an unbendable will; and Minnie plaguing herself that, contrary to her resolutions, she had again given offense where gratitude was due. "If only he could know how sorry I am. How I wish he would only understand *my* side." Despite herself other thoughts crept in: "He has eyes for nothing but the normal and makes suggestions always that admirably fit nothing but the normal. He does not see that there are no rules for exceptions. . . ." Then her heart went back to him. He was pale and seemed to be suffering. She wanted to lay her hand on his, to stroke his hair. Perhaps she ought to kiss him good-by—then perhaps he would forgive her outburst. She moved her hand slightly to place it on his, but withdrew it, out of timidity and the unprecedentedness of such a manifestation in her. Nevertheless, impatient with herself for her wavering, she clung to the thought of kissing him when he left. "I'll just kiss him naturally," she

reflected. . . . "I'll say: 'Abraham, won't you kiss me?' . . . I'll say: 'Abraham, you're so good,' and just kiss him." She got herself nervous, confused, excited, anxious to have it over with.

When finally Abraham rose to leave, she jumped hastily out of the hammock. Her breath came quickly. He held out his hand. She felt as if danger were lurking. He was going—she couldn't say it—he would never know how grateful she was to him for everything. . . . Her pulses throbbed. "Hurry up! Hurry up!" sounded in the turmoil of her mind.

"Kiss me, Abraham," she said tremulously.

It came much too suddenly for Abraham, who was not a man of impulse. He hesitated. An obstruction was removed, leaving a clear view in which Minnie stood out a too-easily procurable wife; he could have her now, at once. But his desire was somehow not present. Instead, there was a much increased sense of the hazards of a union with so odd a creature. With schoolmasterly precision he said:

"You had better control yourself. Don't fall in love with me now. We will wait until you get well and then talk it all over." He fluttered his lids.

Minnie was struck dumb by an immense shame. But somehow, mechanically, she got through with the leave-taking, Abraham's figure a blur before her eyes, his voice sounding muffled and indistinct. . . . When he was gone, she sought to emerge from her stupor and grasp the actuality of what had passed. She gave herself a mental shake, as it were. The humiliation was horrible, horrible. She hid her face in her hands and dropped into the hammock shaken by dry sobs. . . . The supper-bell rang; each clang was a lash on her bruised nerves. She

remained with her head buried low in the hammock until long after nightfall.

LIV

For three months the Settlement sent Minnie her weekly salary. Then came a pleasant letter from Dr. Evangel (in response to one from Minnie informing him that though the three months' vacation had improved her health she was not strong enough yet to work), which said cordially that she was to take as much vacation as she needed, the position would be kept open for her; but since it was now necessary to engage a substitute in her absence, the Settlement could no longer continue to pay her salary.

When Abraham, a week later, found her looking poorly, he wondered somewhat contritely whether his unresponsiveness at the previous visit had given her a setback. Minnie, divining his suspicions, promptly told him of Dr. Evangel's letter.

Here was a problem!

"It was very nice of them to pay me for as long as they did," said Minnie.

"Yes, it was."

Nevertheless, here was a problem! Minnie had no savings.

Abraham sat silent, with lowered, meditative eyes, which he raised to Minnie once or twice scrutinizingly.

"Just *how* do you feel?" he asked finally. "Don't you think you are well enough to go back to work? Maybe if you made up your mind——"

She was tempted to say she would try, for his suspicion that she was weak of will somehow always stung her as

if it were a reflection on her character. But her better sense rose to warn her that if she went to work prematurely she would break down again.

"You see, Abraham," she said, "I am feeling better now, and I *know* I am better. In the same way I would know if I were altogether well. I think it would be unsafe yet for me to go back to work. I don't feel strong enough, but I will be soon, I think, if I don't have things to worry me and set me back, like this letter. I haven't slept for two nights."

A long pause, during which Abraham looked as if he were solving a problem in higher mathematics. Then he said:

"You will have to take money from me until you think you are well enough to go back to the Settlement."

She started. "I won't go back to the Settlement," she cried excitedly.

"What do you mean?" Abraham was astonished.

"I have a feeling of terrible aversion for anything of the old. It's like thinking of the dead in the grave." She was in a panic as if it were in Abraham's power to *force* her to return to the Settlement and the old.

How should Abraham have known that it is from precisely this aversion for the old that the more fortunate, if same kind of sufferers as Minnie, are impelled to seek foreign shores and real diversion?

Abraham laughed, not heartily nor merrily; he laughed good-naturedly at this new idiosyncrasy. Minnie heard a ring of Ida's voice in his laugh; it was mocking her: "Highfalutin—fancy—high-tone." She shuddered and felt the clammy hand of fear, now a much less frequent visitor, clutching at her heart, curling itself about her

spirits like a serpent. It was fear of being outwitted in her resolution not to return to the Settlement.

* * * * *

Abraham had left the landlady of the New Jersey hill money for Minnie's board for the week and was quite willing to pay for her regularly until she was well. As a thing apart from the question of support, he told himself, Minnie's mother and sisters ought to be made to realize that she was really sick and that they were guilty of neglect. If he had been as close to them as to Minnie, he would have urged them, instead of Minnie, to take the first step toward reconciliation.

After deliberation, he paid the Mendels a visit.

They met his suggestion with a tirade; he was lending his protection to a traitor and pretender. They swept the air with their respective hands and vowed it made no difference to them if she died. Indeed, they were certain she would surely outlive them. "A convenient bluff, this nervous prostration," was the finale.

Abraham would not have wished to be guilty of neglecting a sick person, but the responsibility of nurturing imaginary or pretended illness was just as bad. While he was not persuaded by the Mendels into their view, yet he found himself wishing that Minnie would brace up and become her own keeper again. He felt as must the parent of a trying adolescent who looks forward to the time when his child will have crossed the threshold of safe maturity. He made no answer to Sarah's onslaught: "My daughter? She is not my daughter. She is dead to me. A trickster! Only a girl with a stone for a heart would have done such an outrageous thing, pretended to be sick just at that time. If she had said she did not want to come, it would not have been one-thousandth as

vile. I am through with her forever." Though he felt the injustice of the accusation, he could not muster up the fighting spirit to convince this infuriated mother of her mistake, and allayed his conscience by persuading himself that the attempt would in any event be futile. . . . Anyway, the Mendels disgusted him.

He walked home slowly, weighted down by his responsibility. For the first time since matters had assumed their abnormal course, he frankly and clearly hoped that Minnie was not in love with him. He wondered how it was he had never before realized their incompatibility and had overlooked the intrinsic, basic deficiencies of the Mendels' morals. Minnie would as certainly, he felt, develop into a Sarah as two peas develop alike in a pod. He found himself shrinking from the thought of her as a wife. Abraham's soul craved a loving, tender creature, domestic peace and harmony.

LV

The next day the Mendels, in a cooler mood, discussed Minnie among themselves and decided with all generosity that, to be on the safe side so far as their moral responsibility was concerned, they had better send her five dollars to help her with her expenses. Ida undertook to execute the family's resolution. With the money went an epistle. Minnie was not to believe she could have a single cent more, Ida wrote; and as for her nervous prostration, its elements were imagination, exaggeration and affectation; she couldn't fool *them*! If Abraham had any sense, she couldn't fool him either; and if he chose to spoil her he could do so on his *own* money, not theirs.

In the violent rush of indignation that swept upon Min-

nie when she read the letter, she came near tearing it up, five-dollar bill and all, but—what was that about Abraham? What had Abraham to do with it? She read the letter again. No other conclusion than the right one was possible. She marvelled at his audacity; outrage tore at her soul. . . . On the spur of an impulse she snatched a sheet of paper and wrote Ida: "Go to hell and use the five dollars to pay your way," and thrust the currency bill, along with the note, into an envelope. Too spent by the burst of frenzy to post it immediately, she dropped heavily into a chair at the window and looked out. The tree-tops which seemed so merrily to be reaching to the sky drew her eyes, and she stared and stared without moving, thoughts of all sorts staggering through her mind. Envy of these living things which did not know of the sordidness of human relations brought tears to her eyes. For the first time in months she thought of Gregory Chernin, of the fineness of soul that his whole personality distilled, and she felt an at-oneness with him, a yearning and a craving for contact with the beautiful. All her anger mellowed into a sadness, into a depressing realization that she was a foreigner in her world, a misfit. She rose, took the note she had written, tore it up and returned the money without explanation.

When Abraham came the next Sunday she could hardly wait to question him.

He flushed and dropped his eyes. "Why?" he asked. "Did any of them come to see you or did they send you money?"

"They sent me money."

His eyelids fluttered with pleasure. His visit had, after all, been effective. The Mendels were not as bad as their bark.

"Well," he said, "then you should be satisfied."

"You really were there then?"

"Yes. I could not see that there was anything else to do. They owe it to you to look out for you when you are sick. If I were not your friend, for example, what would you do then? It is their duty, their moral duty, to take care of you."

Minnie's blood rushed to her face.

"But I did not give you *permission* to go. Ida sent me a note along with the money and, it seems, she spoke for the family; she wrote as though I had sent you to *beg* for me. She said they were sending me five dollars and would not send me one cent more, that I need not *ask* for more. How do you suppose I feel?"

Abraham was shocked, staggered. His mission had been too well meant for *such* results. His lips opened once, twice, and made no sound.

They were silent for some time, cogitating. Minnie concluded that Abraham's recourse to the family came from his unwillingness to pay her board.

"I am sorry it turned out so badly," Abraham broke in on her thought. "I meant well. You must not think I went because I want to be relieved of the financial responsibility I have undertaken."

Minnie made no reply, but when, on leaving, he handed her a roll of bills, she refused to take them, and all his efforts to persuade her were vain.

"What are you going to do?" he asked, truly distressed.

She tried to evade, but upon his insisting said:

"I lent a friend money once, and now that *I* am in need she will return the courtesy, I feel sure." More quietly she added: "As soon as I go back to work, I will

return everything I have borrowed." Her tone forbade arguing.

A shade of a shadow of relief flitted across Abraham's face as he placed the bills back into his pocket with a light sigh.

She sat for a long time after he left immersed in thought. She had slaved from very infancy, and now that she was used up she was nobody's responsibility. She had served the world as a worker, yet the same world seemed to consider it none of its business that she had worn herself out serving it. If it was possible for her to scramble up again, well and good, it seemed to say; and if not, well and good, too. And yet as soon as she was again equipped, this world would commandeer her working powers once more. "What an awfully unfair game!" She seemed to be living through an immense moment—one of those moments during which life flares up in great gleams. . . . "Only a hair's breadth divides me from the Helina Heimath, from the Peoples Charities. . . . As if it is my fault that the world did not remunerate me for my best efforts sufficiently so that I could provide against this emergency; and the world has the right to punish me *besides* by making me an object of to-day's charity—equal to the slops thrown a pig. . . . Something's wrong somewhere. . . ." She seemed to hear Gregory Chernin agreeing with her; she seemed to feel his presence close, his soul at one with hers, as if he of all the world felt with her. . . . She wondered where he could be at that very moment—perhaps thinking of her, too. . . . By a swift combination of thought and emotion she began to wonder whether Boston wouldn't be a better place to go to than New York. New York loomed up grimy, holding nothing more for her than a repetition of the old hard-

ships, terminating in another spell of sickness. It would be getting up in the morning, with the subway crush and the nightly rush to get home in time for supper; with the evening either empty or spent at work in the Settlement, or in a stuffy theater, or listening to the false charm of music—false because it stirred a multitude of divine emotions which would only go to smash in the morrow's drabness. . . . The prospect of all this over again filled her with unmitigated aversion. She marvelled now that so many people were willing to live exactly that sort of thing for a whole lifetime. . . . "Boston has such lovely suburbs, everybody says. Maybe I can get work in one. . . ." Her heart swelled with hopes.

LVI

Poverty, the devoted cur, is not to be shaken off by a mere change of locality.

Minnie reached Boston with only five dollars in her pocket and enough experience to know she was standing on thin ice, but an unshaken will not to take more money from Ella Liebman, kind and urgent though she had been. Minnie was depending upon the Fates to be quick in finding her work, and quick they were. Though exhausted from the trip, she went straight from the railroad station to an employment agency and was promptly engaged as stenographer by a Mr. Little of Little's Hotel. She saw in this good luck a desire on the part of the Supreme Being to redeem Himself, and out of sheer gratitude she could have hugged the telephone to her breast when Mr. Little's voice came through the receiver saying: "I shall expect you then this evening at eight o'clock."

* * * * *

Little's Hotel, in one of Boston's lovely suburbs, with

the very best service and fare to recommend it, boasted of even more to do the same. What this was Minnie did not learn until after she had been in Mr. Little's employ two weeks, had written Abraham that all his fears had been groundless, as she was ideally placed, had sent three joyous missives to Ella Liebman, and had decided that she was quite the luckiest person in the world. Then came knowledge and a turn in her affairs. Mr. Little asked her to read proof of a new edition of the hotel's descriptive booklet.

"HEBREWS, DOGS, CONSUMPTIVES, AND OTHER OBJECTIONABLES NOT ACCOMMODATED."

Minnie looked at "Hebrews" with the incredulity with which one views one's own name in print, and tried to associate it, for its serious meaning, with the last words, "not accommodated." From some perverse impulse she wanted to laugh, and smiled in compromise. She held the proof off at arm's length. "Gracious! What can it mean?" she asked herself, and decided to put the question to Mr. Little. But Mr. Little always wore such a drawn brow, as if something provoked him, and had such an intimidating way of looking over the heads of his employees that she could not pluck up the courage to approach him.

The matter lingered with her like a bad odor, though she made every effort to forget it, and tried to persuade herself that it must apply only to the unrefined. But—her mind carried her on with faultless logic—there were unrefined Italians, unrefined Irish, unrefined Americans, too. The booklet did not discriminate against these. *All* Jews were referred to. It was difficult to accept the fact.

A few days later Mr. Little turned a perplexed face upon Minnie, with whom he was alone in the office.

"Miss Mendel," he asked, "have you ever heard the name Pashenz? Does it sound Hebrew to you?"

Minnie's color rose. She straightened her shoulders and rested her eyes on him.

"No, it does not."

"I didn't think so either. But this is," he said, holding up another letter signed Moskowitz.

"Yes, it is," replied Minnie quietly.

Mr. Little faced his desk again.

Minnie, stiffened into immobility by a prickling swarm of peculiar sensations, sat staring at his back. Presently he turned and asked her to take dictation. She crossed over to him with an unconscious air of haughtiness, a little above herself.

To Mr. Pashenz went a letter offering him the widest choice of rooms. Mr. Moskowitz was told that the hotel was crowded to its capacity.

She walked back to her desk listlessly, overcome by a new kind of depression, in which feeling for self was exalted to a lofty sympathy with others. For the first time she realized she was Jewish, that there was a Jewish world, distinct and apart, which suffered and was at the mercy of others. She felt the fibers of her heart branching out.

"You are a Jew," the keys of the typewriter clicked, "you are not welcome here." The cloud that had lifted for the two brief weeks descended again, seeming to gloat in its smugness. "What will you do? You cannot stay here!" Tears came to her eyes. "You have no money and you are not altogether well and you have no place to go to," the keys clicked on melancholically. She felt like a beast with a bit much too thick for its mouth. She was aghast at the problem that faced her.

"Are all Christians like Mr. Little?" she asked the clicking keys. "No one at the Settlement was like Mr. Little. Doctor Evangel wasn't. No one was—not Mr. Grave——" She rapped the keys for mentioning this name. The keys redeemed themselves. "Mr. Maloney was a Christian, and he loved you and wanted to marry you. He certainly did not hold your Jewishness against you." Minnie smiled at her whimsical conversation with the keys, and for a moment felt as if Mr. Maloney's spirit were hovering over her protectively against Mr. Little. When Mr. Maloney's spirit departed, she felt lonely. "Oh, dear!" she thought, "I ought not to have gone away from everybody I know. Abraham was right." She wiped tears away so that she could type the letter to Mr. Moskowitz telling him there was no room for him at Little's Hotel. Abraham was right about many things, she suddenly saw. The keys clicked to her in his words:

"Thus has all your race been hounded throughout the centuries. Thus have they come by their despised faults, aggressiveness, greed, servility. These are their weapons of self-defense."

Things personal to her seemed to shrink, while her heart expanded with what was akin to maternal love for the Schlopoborskys of the world, the Henry Street neighbors, the Morris Caplans.

LVII

The physical geography of Mr. Pashenz proclaimed him a member of the unwelcome race. Mr. Little was provoked. Of course, it was not Minnie's fault, he allowed; the man's misdemeanor was not written in his

name. But Mr. Little instructed Minnie to be miserly of civility to the gentleman. That, he said, was his successful method for giving an unwelcome guest to understand that he was to take himself off.

Minnie's color rose furiously. A thousand different feelings seemed to explode in her heart. She jumped from her seat and, contrary to a well-thought-out resolution to remain in her present position until the last of the month, when her salary would afford her a margin of safety, she burst out:

"Mr. Little, you had better get someone to take my place. I am a Jew, too." Contempt rang in her voice and blazed in her eyes.

Mr. Little, shaken out of his equilibrium, looked up at her without replying. He tchicked his lips in sheer embarrassment. Then, after a moment's pause, he said with all courtesy and sincerity:

"I am sorry. I assure you, some of my best friends are Jews, but in a hotel they cannot mix."

It was queer that some of his best friends should be Jews. Minnie was muddled, but her paramount feeling was of insult.

"I have Gentile friends, too," she said with dignity. "None of them were ever so insulting." Tears of impotence sprang to her eyes.

Mr. Little said nothing more. Minnie went to her room, where she hastily flung into her hand-bag all her worldly possessions and soon re-appeared for her salary. At the desk she found Mr. Pashenz calling Mr. Little's attention to an overcharge.

"These cigarettes amount to \$1.17. You've got me charged with \$1.27."

Mr. Little rectified the error with perfect courtesy but

with a faint expression about the corners of his mouth which said:

"You'd think it was ten dollars. Not a cent ever escapes them."

It was Minnie's turn.

"Let's see," said Mr. Little, "your salary is thirty dollars a month. You are leaving two days in advance—that's about \$27.50 due you." He made a rapid calculation. "No, \$27.09."

Turning to leave, Minnie found herself facing Mr. Pashenz, an undersized man, with dark, melancholy eyes, out of which he looked from down up as if probing space.

"You're not wanted here," was on the tip of her tongue.

Around the man's mouth played a cynical smile, which threatened a hard, bitter laugh. Minnie lowered her head and hastened out. A few moments afterwards she was on a car bound for Boston.

She reached the city late in the afternoon and stood irresolutely looking up and down the street. Her hat was blown slightly askew, some loose strands of hair straggled over her eyes and down her cheeks. Her handbag, pulling her lop-sided, gave the appearance of being heavier than it actually was. Her face was wan. She was a forlorn figure. With the timidity of a sensitive person with whom insult lingers she approached a policeman and asked him if he could recommend a place for her to stay overnight. It would have taken less keenness than this shrewd officer's to observe that his customer was of the class that toil and spin. Her worn raiment identified her.

"There's the Elizabeth Home for Girls, Miss," he said and let the statement hang in midair until Minnie say-

ing "Thank you," he straightened up in the way of a policeman when he would like to vaunt his omniscience. He directed her, swinging his club expansively.

One can never be sure in Boston when a simple errand will resolve itself into a journey, a tour, a pilgrimage. You feel like a spinning top as you wind your way through the puzzlesome streets. By the time Minnie finally reached the Elizabeth Home she had been resigned to the fictitious existence of such a Home and her doubts had been strong as to whether Boston embraced more than the one corner from which she had started out an X-number of times.

The Elizabeth Home and the Young Ladies' Lodge were identical in character, with the exception that the Elizabeth Home was a strictly Christian institution, as proclaimed by a large oil painting of the crucified Saviour in the lobby.

The lady stationed at a desk in the hall to receive newcomers wore somber black and a facial expression that would have dampened the spirits of a sunny day. Since the institution was, first and foremost, respectable, each prospective guest was required to state her pedigree and give information on such personal points as the church she attended and the regularity of her attendance.

When an outlaw escapes from one officer of the peace only to fall into the clutches of another, he must experience some such sensation as did Minnie at the last question. Her heart gave a leap, her eyes a swift dart to the door. She had the impulse to give the somber little lady a neat slap in the face and run away. But the beauty of normal people is that their criminal and insane impulses come like lightning and are dispelled like a whiff.

"I am a Jewess," Minnie replied quietly, "I do not go to church."

The lady floundered, then expressed herself as having no objection to Minnie personally; the institution, however, made sectarianism a principle; but, of course, since she was a stranger in the city and night was advancing, she could remain, and every effort would be made for her comfort and every help extended to find another home for her in the morning.

No queerer place than this world seemed possible. Minnie shrugged her shoulders and looked hard at the little woman in somber black. Had all of the world's lunatics been dumped in Massachusetts? A smile played on Minnie's lips, in her heart was a moan. Could she have seen herself at that moment, she would have recognized Mr. Pashenz' own expression.

She rose, picked up her hand-bag, thanked the little lady, and said she would find another place. The little lady followed her to the door, assuring her again with all courtesy that she was welcome for the night if she cared to remain.

An exaggerated calm possessed Minnie, the calm that comes from the realization that in calm alone lies safety. "It's no use zu talkin'"—in dark moods she joked with herself in Morris Caplan's lingo; at this moment she experienced a fleeting homesickness for him—"I'm up against it more than I bargained for." The very terror that struck at her heart warned her to keep her mind clear. She was alone in a big city; it was dusk already.

Across the street was a park. She was very tired and would rest there a moment. On the nearest bench sat a woman, a little farther away, on another bench, was a man with his back turned. The woman, looking up as

Minnie approached, so greatly suggested the somber lady of the Elizabeth Home that Minnie was taken by a freakish impulse.

"Madam," said she, smiling and bowing deferentially, "have you any objections to my sitting beside you? I am a Jew."

The weazened little woman lifted a thoroughly scared face. She rose and edged away cautiously from this lunatic.

At the first word from Minnie's lips the solitary man sitting on the next bench turned round and stared. A look of delight lit up his face. He rose and stepped towards Minnie, whose eyes, following the retreating little figure in black, encountered his.

"Gregory!"

"Minnie!" He took her in his arms.

LVIII

The train was speeding through a spring landscape. It was a day of burgeoning. The trees swelling out of their winter starkness, the fresh green blades peeping out where the dead brown leaves had been swirled away by the wind, the tender spikes of forest growth pricking up out of the black soil all seemed to say: "We are alive again."

Looking out of the train window Minnie felt her soul akin to this budding joyousness. Like a mother, whose attention is engaged elsewhere, by half conscious effort discourages a child's interruption, she discouraged a minor note of melancholy that tugged at her heart. How impossible it was to realize with dear Gregory sitting there beside her, holding her hand, smiling his all-embracing smile whenever she raised her eyes to him, that a

blight was eating at their spring joyousness! He did not even *look* like a sick man. His color was better, his eyes brighter than on the night of the street meeting. But mercy, the eyes were *too* bright, the color too good! A pain like a sharp, thin needle drilled through her heart, and the spring landscape merged with an autumnal wind that groaned weirdly: "Your lover is sick; the Alkrusht Sanitarium for him."

To divert her mind, she turned to Gregory and said:

"By the way, dear, I wrote Dr. Judson that I *am* a Protestant."

Gregory smiled. It was a joke between them that he had saved her from the maws of sectarianism by taking her with him to his own boarding-house where there had happened to be a room vacant. In order to be with him at Saranac she had applied for a position as secretary and, since a Protestant was required, she had promptly subscribed to the faith.

"You're a little liar," said Gregory, "what would Mr. Little say?"

She would have sworn her soul away to be with him. She pressed his hand and smiled up at him wistfully, and such a passionate yearning to save this dear one from ill fate welled up in her that the tender words fairly burst from her lips:

"Oh, Gregory, dear, I love you so!"

He looked down on her tenderly for a moment and then looked away.

Oh, if she could only convince him that it had *not* been wrong for him to admit his love for her! She lived over again their hour together in the Boston Public Gardens when his love avowal had come, as he later put it, independently of his better reason. The night of the street meeting he had already known that he was sick; and that

night he had known for certain that the little gray-eyed girl of the gaming days was an integral part of his being, that when years before he had urged his mother to look her up at the Argushes and explain away her misunderstanding, he had urged it in the hope that she would come again to their home, for he had missed her greatly; and that when word came later from the Argushes of her disappearance, his scanning of remote corners of the tenement halls for a letter from her which the careless letter-carrier must certainly have misplaced, was from a feeling deep, deep-rooted.

She sighed as she looked up at the dear averted face, every line of which told of the soul within, the soul which she had loved in Mr. Grave's shell. She leaned her head lightly against his shoulder. . . . She was betrothed to this man, this man of real heart and mind and soul, this man who was the answer to the deepest call of her being. How she loved him! Her life, her devotion, her everything would be dedicated to him. He would grow better in the Alkrusht Sanitarium. She needed nothing for herself, everything, every bit of everything would go to him, to bring the normal color to his cheeks, to reduce the feverish glitter of his dear eyes—to save him—— Next spring all would be well. It would be just such a day of burgeoning when they would go to a little home of their own—they would live where there was a lovely landscape—she would keep him in the sunshine—there would be sunshine everywhere——

"Saranac! Saranac!" called the conductor.

LIX

In the mournful glamour of the reds and yellows of decaying nature, Minnie walking alone where she and

Gregory had walked before, sitting alone where she and Gregory had sat before, her great gray eyes searching vacancy, made a dejected, listless figure. One day Dr. Judson called her to his private office.

"My dear," he said, "won't you try to rouse yourself, to cry, to let loose? It would do you so much good."

"I can't."

"Then make a change, seek something new, go home to your people, your old friends. It will take you away from your grief."

Take her away from her grief! As if her grief could be left behind, as if the emptiness of the world would not follow her elsewhere! A sigh mingled with a wan smile of appreciation.

"You are very good. But won't you let me stay here? I would so much rather."

"Certainly. Yes, indeed. I'm mighty glad to have you; I was thinking of what might be best for *you*."

"It's best for me to stay."

* * * * *

Minnie's soul basking in the sunshine of memories of Gregory flowered into the beauty of its promise. Not a thought, not a feeling of hers was apart from his influence. Big in mind, vast in spirit, with a thorough comprehension of men and things, alive to weaknesses, tolerant, with a heart of love and with a tempering sanity, he had raised Minnie to the standard to which she had blindly, unknowingly reached out. The world was no longer the same to her, nor were things, nor were people. What had seemed vice, now in the illumination of Gregory's tolerance and love, was mere involuntary fault, selfishness a mere weapon of defense in the ugly competitive game; "slickness" Gregory had called it with tolerant

pity. . . . Behind Abraham's pedantry and arbitrariness, likewise, he had discerned a fine, upright, trustworthy man; once even he had said of him, more serious than she had taken it, that he would feel easy with her in Abraham's care if he could not himself take care of her. . . . Through association with this man, who combined profound human insight with his intellectuality, she saw her old self now as Abraham must have seen her—a creature whose intellect and heart had wanted to branch like a wild plant and had recoiled from attempts at pruning. Where Abraham had failed to make her understand, Gregory had succeeded; but Gregory's success gave her sympathy with Abraham's attempts. . . . She began to wonder how, with her maturer understanding, she would now get along with her family, to whom her thoughts also began to turn. Was her mother doing well in South Africa? Minnie had never approved of the venture and was terribly afraid her mother might be suffering again. . . . And Beckie—and Ida and Jacob—how were they getting on without their mother? One day, lonely and longing, she wrote to her sisters. A reply came promptly containing a history of the family's fortunes. Sarah had left for Africa, and Jacob, to help maintain the home, which otherwise would have had to be broken up, had returned to live with his sisters. For some time the arrangement worked well; then Jacob bolted. Sick of school-teaching and satisfied that in this age of woman's equality with man his sisters could shift for themselves, he had gone off on a trip to Europe for a change from the daily grind. The girls could not keep up the home and were just deciding to store the furniture against their mother's return (they were sure she *would* return; and a nice big bill for stor-

age she would have to meet!) when Minnie's letter arrived. Minnie ought to come back and help keep up the home and shoulder her responsibility "for once."

Minnie did. And Abraham was convinced that she was at last coming to the normal sense of normal people, though at the same time a resentful feeling was blown into flame that Minnie never could be convinced until the bitter end was reached.

LX

Beckie and Ida were still the same, squabbling over trifles, loving in their crude fashion, agreeable and disagreeable in their simple way. Curious as to the change in Minnie, they often remarked to each other on her gravity, her softness and poise, in smiling whispers behind her back though there was that about her personality which in her presence compelled respect and convinced them of her sincerity. Outlets for their disrespectfulness were confined to healthy discharges upon each other.

The two younger girls had a natural family affection for each other, while for Minnie even Beckie had only a tempered love and Ida none at all. They felt constrained with her as with a stranger.

After a while, with closer and more familiar association, they began to suspect her of affectation, resenting her new ways as Sarah's neighbors had resented her aloofness. Ida particularly, whose ideal henceforth became ultra-simplicity of manner, felt contempt for her sister for "putting on airs" and in counter-distinction began to cultivate an exaggeratedly Yiddish inflection and a louder voice, and abstained from the commonest shows

of politeness. For a sister to say "thank you," "if you please" was a disgusting affectation.

Once Minnie called Beckie "dear." That decided Ida. She let loose her pent-up contempt. Thenceforth "pretender" addressed to Minnie was as frequent and facile an epithet on her lips as "pig" addressed, on provocation, to Beckie. Had not Minnie now had the balancing weight of maturity, quarrels might have ensued. Ida's fire, however, could not feed on Minnie's silence, and her respectful attitude, the next time the two had communication, would quench the blaze completely.

The home was lonely. The world was lonely. Minnie was grateful for Abraham's visits to which she grew to look forward eagerly. Her deference and gentleness rather puzzled him. In spite of a desire to be appreciative, he had an inner shrinking from this strange Minnie. He, too, in the privacy of his being, smelt affectation in her present agreement with his opinions. Breathes there the man who hankers after the attainable!

LXI

Yetta Grubicha was the chief office clerk of the Paragon Knee Pants Company, which occupied a loft in the same building as the firm in which Minnie was employed.

Yetta outwitted her destiny. In one of the Fates' rare moments of unwariness, she slipped from between their fingers. One week of machine-operating convinced her there was no prestige in it and confirmed her in the determination to fight her mother into letting her study stenography.

"You are not even a school graduate," objected her mother.

"Mind your own business," quoth Yetta.

Some secretarial school of light conscience admitted her as a pupil and in three months' time turned her out a full-fledged stenographer. But she could not slough her inherited strain of commonness as she had cast behind her the work-shop. It jumped to the light in her emphatic clothes, her pretentious friends, and her adoration of near-classics in music, the drama, and fiction.

Once, recuperating from an illness, she spent several weeks with her employers in the country. Their sister was a soft, refined, sweet-mannered person, whose ways made such an impression upon Yetta that ever afterwards she went about imitative, putting into her voice the other's lingering sweetness of tone and into her eyes the same gentle, intimate expression. In the practice of her mannerisms she never arrived at unconsciousness. They never came quite natural to her. Those who had known her before her "conversion" smiled at it, while her parents scoffed at her for aspiring to "whole ladyship." It was for such as she to remain with tastes befitting her station. Their fear was that she would refuse to marry any man who was not a doctor or a lawyer, to which class of gentlemen, as they understood matters, every "high-tone lady" aspired. All they needed, nee! to complete their earthly happiness was to have an old maid on their hands! As if they did not have worries enough with all sorts of family troubles and wrangles and an unruly boy who had landed in a reformatory. Yetta resented their interference. Quarrels arose in which she discarded her veneer, meeting her coarse parents on a level. The oftener they cautioned her to "stay in her own back

yard," the fiercer became her defiance and her longing and resolution really to get herself a professional man if only to spite them.

She joined a club in contemporary drama to which, she had been told, nice girls belonged. Through nice girls, she calculated, one was likely to meet nice men. Nor did she confine herself for nice girls to the class in contemporary drama. She ferreted them out in all the walks of life, and spotting Minnie as a nice girl among the female employees of the office building who came to the women's room, she made advances to her. Though Minnie was at first repelled by this maiden of big bulk of bust, dusky skin, and large, coarse features, Yetta's manners were so deceptive that by degrees Minnie, who had no feelers out for guile of any sort, was drawn to her. The two began to eat lunch and walk home together.

Once Yetta paid Minnie a visit. She met Abraham. That one visit increased her devotion to Minnie a thousandfold; and when at another visit she met a friend of Abraham's, a Doctor Henry Flegal, her ardor grew so intense that it had to expend itself in gifts and treats of all sorts. Minnie was reduced to affection for Yetta and tears of gratitude. Yetta's visits increased in number.

By making Minnie the repository of intimate confessions she maneuvered herself into her confidence, and once she deftly lured Minnie on to admit that she would be willing to marry Abraham and was suffering from his present indifference. Minnie blushed and trembled after the confession. She had not even formulated her feelings before. Yetta, like a beckoning finger, had led her on to the ripening of the thought in her mind and to the admission. When Yetta was gone, she threw herself

on her bed and buried her head in the pillow. "Gregory, Gregory!" she moaned, while the loneliness and emptiness of her life tore her spirits to the core. "I have nothing—nobody—— You said you would feel easy if I were in Abraham's care. He *is* good—I *could* atone to him for what I made him suffer. What more does life hold with *you* gone? Oh, Gregory! If I were educated, had had a decent start, I might devote myself to some big thing, something outside myself, but as it is, what more can I ask for than the commonplace?"

She sobbed until her body ached and then lay quietly watching a ray of the dying sun playing on the wall.

LXII

Among the many convictions at which the Abraham of twenty-seven had arrived was the conviction that a man of clean morals must marry. He was of the philosophy that man is history and it is only natural that history repeat itself. Everybody said so. All the laws pointed that way. He took no advantage of the license for promiscuousness granted his sex when the world began. To his moral way of thinking what was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander. A man of unchaste morals had no right to exact greater perfection of a woman. Abraham was a just man.

On the subject of marriage without love he was of a twofold opinion. The sanctifying passion was, of course, infinitely preferable, but however much in love a man and woman might be, if their temperaments threatened incompatibility, by far the wiser course for them to pursue was to remain apart. Progeny were entitled to an harmonious parentage. Yet at the thought of entering

marriage without love he felt a vague regret, a sadness as like an intense emotion as the mist is like the rain. At such times, visited by a faint melancholy, he would come oftener to see Minnie, under much the same impulse that sends the living to visit the graves of the dead. He would talk more vivaciously than had been his wont since her return to New York and try his best to work up his old interest in her. But she was not the same Minnie. She was a pleasant, soft-mannered young woman, who now fully assented to the doctrine that "public ownership of the means of production, that is, the government ownership of mines, mills, factories and all public utilities, would eliminate the exploitation of one human being by another and so rid the world of the great evils of the day, poverty, child labor, etc." She was now as fully convinced as he that the Jews should possess a land of their own, like all the other nations, and so be freed from soul oppression, the better to perpetuate the wonderful qualities of mind and spirit that kept them, though persecuted and scattered, a unit through the ages. And most disconcertingly, she was now assured that every person ought to be informed about the sanctuary of his soul, his body. Martin's *Human Body* ought to be widely read. Abstract reasoning and thinking had unfolded in her like a butterfly within its cocoon.

Her agreeableness irritated Abraham much as an ultra-excellent quality in a first wife will irritate a husband. He would squirm in his chair; "affectation" would sound in his mind. But worst of all, her agreeableness smelled like a bait. Abraham, like all men, was not of a mind to be caught.

Although he tried to overcome his increasing indifference, he grew more and more convinced that Minnie

was not for him. . . . But "a man must marry" and since the passion that he had felt for Minnie could not come to him again for another woman, he would be obliged to make a practical match. He would have to find a simple, sensible girl, healthy above all, with no nonsense about her. His sisters' friends, to whom he now began to pay attention, were nice girls, but none of them had qualities that seemed to fuse into a desirable whole. He would hold each up for mathematical survey. One had good sense and a pleasant manner, but a foolish laugh. One had nice manners, a nice laugh and was even pretty, but looked anemic, as if she might have a nervous breakdown.

Of all the girls he knew it was in Yetta Grubicha that the good qualities outweighed the bad. Her homeliness might be a drawback, but upon due cogitation he decided that, on the contrary, it might be a virtue. It would make her the more devoted to him. He tested her intellectual capacity by specific quizzing, and though he found her beneath the standard of even the Minnie of old, she was always as eager as a child to learn and listened to him as to an oracle. It would be rather pleasant, he concluded, always to have her by his side to teach. To be sure she irritatingly used "seen" for "saw" and "says" for "said." But it was a very minor fault, taken all in all. Experience with Minnie had taught that when a man is out on the business of wife-hunting, it is the larger things that count. Yetta Grubicha had a healthy body which gave promise of repeated motherhood without hysteria, and she had the second wife's agreeableness that men always appreciate.

And Yetta, with native shrewdness, divining Abraham's state of mind, played upon him at every oppor-

tunity. Insofar as her obligations to Minnie were concerned, she took a convenient, clean-cut road to the conclusion that she was not guilty of theft, since Abraham was not in love with Minnie. And even if he were, marriage to-day was a business. Until then her own horizon had kept uncharitably clear of such "grand chances" as Abraham, whereas Minnie's had not. Minnie was likely to have other chances.

"I'll be hung," was her ultimatum to herself, "if I'll let foolishness stand in my way."

To divert Minnie's suspicion, she pretended that she spent a great deal of time with Doctor Henry Flegal and was eloquent in his praise. And on the score of Abraham's divulging anything she rested easy. Men never spoke of their second choice to their first choice.

Minnie was successfully put on the false scent. With the matchmaker's instinct present in every woman, she had dreams of helping her homely but nice friend win the idol of her heart, Doctor Flegal, and often puzzled the gentleman with rhapsodies in eulogy of Yetta Grubicha.

LXIII

One evening Abraham, in a mood for woman, made his way to Yetta's home on the chance of finding her in. He walked slowly, as if giving earnest contemplation to each step. It was not until he awaited the response to his ring of the lower bell that he realized he would be disappointed if he did not find Yetta at home. The sound of the answering click was a distinct pleasure.

At the door of the apartment he was met, without his having to ring, by Yetta clad in a kimona of becoming

red silk. She had been preparing for bed and had assumed it was one of the family, who were all out, that had rung.

Gathering her kimono hastily about her uncorseted form, she hesitated an instant, then sang out coyly:

"I'll run into my room and get dressed; you go into the parlor. I'll be out in a minute."

Her heavy hips quivered as she ran to her bedroom. As he reached the parlor, she closed the door separating the two rooms.

Abraham sat idly a few moments, looking from the window to the door and back again, and listening to her footsteps as she moved between the dresser and the closet. In his mind lingered the picture of her large, shaking hips.

Soon she called out with a sensuous softness in her voice:

"I'm coming soon." She was wondering excitedly, all a-quiver with the triumph, what had brought him. Until then he had announced his visits. Though the two were already sufficiently familiar to call each other by their first names, there was something more deliciously intimate in this informality. Taking every precaution to look her best, she hesitated between two dresses and finally chose the one that accentuated the curves of her figure.

Abraham cleared his throat and replied:

"Don't hurry."

He looked toward the door of the bedroom, fancied her partially garbed figure, and colored. To distract his mind, he picked up a magazine on the table and began to read; he raised his head every moment at the sound of her footsteps to glance toward the door expectantly.

At last she appeared. Smiling, with her assumed expression of warmth and intimacy, she crossed the room to shake hands. Abraham rose quickly, flushing. An expanse of red, purple and yellow bead embroidery, which radiated a warmth, drew his eyes to the bosom of her dress. His mind became momentarily clouded and his feet a trifle unsteady. He controlled himself, and it was not in the least observable that he had undergone emotion.

They shook hands and then seated themselves with the room's length between. Yetta's heart was pounding. And Abraham, though outwardly calm, was ill at ease.

Yetta said: "I did not expect you. I was thunder-struck when I seen you."

The "seen" restored Abraham to equanimity. He felt the superior at once. It gave him poise.

"I told you many times to say 'saw,'" he said with schoolmasterly kindness and the fluttering droop of his eyelids.

Yetta colored and looked appreciative, like a little girl. When Abraham tried to teach her, she affected a child-like way of paying attention.

"Saw," she repeated coyly, dropping her eyes and raising them again and thrusting her chin forward as a child does when it capitulates. She was conscious of pleasing Abraham.

A moment's silence followed, during which Abraham's eyes traveled over the beaded expanse. The instant Yetta addressed him again, he removed his eyes and turned in his chair guiltily.

"Have you been thinking of me?" she asked, proposing to be the leader if need be.

Abraham smiled self-consciously. Truth to tell, he

had not been thinking of her especially. He had been thinking rather of her sex and to this he could not very well admit.

"Why, yes," he replied, still smiling, his voice and manner betraying discomfort.

"What were you thinking?" she asked, leaning forward so that the opening at her throat brought to view the part between her breasts. An electric thrill went through Abraham. He dropped his eyes, coughed and became ultra-dignified. But the exact state of his feelings were revealed to the wise Yetta by the contraction and the moisture of his eyes when he raised them again. She moved from one side of her chair to the other, while she placed both her hands upon her hips and took a deep breath, expanding her chest.

Abraham watched the movement and frowned, wishing he were not so conscious of her that evening. He disliked himself in such a mood. But it was this very mood in the smouldering that had brought him to her door. It was the same mood that would have taken another man to the door of a public woman.

"I've worked awfully hard to-day," she said, "I'm quite tired. I was going to bed. We have ever so many orders for a new kind of pants that the firm is manufacturing. They engaged two more salesmen. . . . I'm tired," she said again, stretching her hands forward as if to clasp something.

Though Abraham affected interest, he hardly heard what she said. When she stretched her hands forward, he had an almost overwhelming desire to jump from his seat and meet her in an embrace.

"Is that so?" he asked merely to say something.

"And last night I was up late in the contemporary

drama class. Oh, we're getting on fine there. We're learning parts of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*." She waxed enthusiastic.

This really interested Abraham. He had aspirations for Yetta, too. Learning appealed to Abraham above everything else.

"Do you expect to become an actress?" he asked facetiously.

Yetta thought he was making fun of her and actually felt a little hurt. It came to her that the sense of hurt was a good emotion to play up, and she met his look in a steady gaze lasting a moment, the while bringing tears to her eyes.

"You're making fun of me!" she cried in a low voice.

Abraham was stung with regret, which increased as she dropped her head into the palms of her hands. Goodness, was she crying? He jumped quickly from his chair, and the next instant was by her side. At the same moment she raised her eyes to him moist but smiling.

"I'm not crying!" she said sweetly, shaking her head. "Silly thing!" she added, laying her hand on his arm.

They remained for a moment in that position, he looking down upon her. Then he moved back to his chair, picked it up and brought it close to hers.

His sudden nearness so overwhelmed Yetta that she craved his embrace, whether he meant to propose to her or not. From the intensity of her feeling she was silent. He, too, was silent.

Finally he laid his hand in her lap. She raised it and laid it on the arm of her chair. He was puzzled. It reached him hazily that she was as much aquiver as he, but this slightly repellant action daunted his assurance. Manlike, however, he immediately did the same thing

over again. This time Yetta raised his hand from her lap, but allowed it to rest in her hand. They sat in silence, each full of emotion. He fondled a ring on her finger, a large gilt ring of clumsy make, obviously a man's.

"Oh, where did you get *that*?" he asked as though out of great curiosity, smiling and raising his clouded eyes to hers. She met his glance only for a fraction of a second as she was fearful of a tell-tale expression in her own eyes.

"A gentleman friend of mine gave it to me," she said.

He did not hear her. He was looking at her hand, a shapely, fleshy hand, soft and warm. He raised it to his lips and kissed it. With that the passion eating in his blood surged up. He leaned over. In the movement his hand came in contact with the softness of her bulk of bust. He was stunned. He dropped his head upon her bosom, called her peevishly, pleadingly, "Dear," as if in advance to silence protest, and then gently brought her head down to meet his. She led in a passionate kiss. They remained in silent embrace.

She stroked his scanty hair. "Why didn't you tell me sooner?" she cooed, bringing the soft, intimate expression into her voice and eyes as she looked down upon him, bending at the same time to kiss his forehead. The act stirred a momentary feeling of sanctity in Abraham's breast. It was a mother act. He warmed to the mother in Yetta.

"Why not?" crossed his mind with melancholy resignation. He was not in love with Yetta. He knew it even in this moment of passion; but she made promise of such a satisfactory mate! He was sure that the girl was in love with *him*. He closed his eyes. A shadowy longing

for Minnie in Yetta's stead crossed his heart. He sighed. His life was not to be one of romance. . . . Yetta, seeing the fleeting pain on his face, bent down and kissed his lips with passion. All the world swept out of existence for Abraham. Her breast rested upon his chest. He caught her passionately in his arms and pressed her to him with all the recklessness of starvation.

LXIV

In South Africa Leopold Pollack met with a lukewarm reception, but before he had time to warn Sarah, she packed up and went to join him. In his eagerness to escape possible dependence in America he had partially blinded himself to the fact that human nature is the same the world over and dependence in South Africa is as little sweet as elsewhere. Leopold's relatives, after their first silent amazement, began to talk among themselves. What could the two have thought by coming such a distance to plant themselves sans sufficient funds among people who until then had been happy? Their unfriendliness, especially after Sarah's arrival, grieved Leopold so that he began to ail. Sarah was alarmed and looked into a black future, yet, with her eternal love of life, she defied facts again.

"What," she cried to Leopold when a year had gone by, "are you grieving so for? God mine! So we'll tell them to go to the devil and return to America. We have enough for traveling expenses, and when we get back something will turn up. If you make yourself sick what will it avail us?"

She cheered and petted him, and at times even worked

herself up into hopefulness. Only in the darkness of the night would the actuality stare her in the face like a grinning skeleton. She would curl up in a knot, the goose flesh would stand out on her skin, and her tongue and lips would grow dry. What would she and Leopold go back to in America? In the daytime, however, she kept up a show of optimism. But Leopold was not without eyes for her deepening sallowness and loss of flesh.

In the end her hopes prevailed, and they set sail for New York. Though it was tacitly understood between them that they were not to go to the children, they made no plans for another home, each too tight with worry for words; and when the dock in New York was reached they exchanged glances of terrified helplessness. Sarah, frenzied by the sight of Leopold's haggard face, cried involuntarily:

"I know a nice two-room house on Henry Street. Let us go there. There always used to be rooms. We'll take two rooms."

Leopold bowed his head. Like two pilgrims they walked silently to the Henry Street tenement of Sarah's past. There were two rooms vacant on the ground floor.

As Sarah stood with Leopold and the janitress looking about the melancholy premises, a ton weight rested on her soul. She pressed the top of her head with one hand and bit her upper lip to hide its quivering. When Leopold paid a deposit a groan almost escaped her.

When they were alone, assuming a calm demeanor, she said: "There must be a second-hand furniture shop in the neighborhood; let's go out and buy a few things."

"I'll go alone, you stay here and rest," he said, and left.

Sarah turned aimlessly about the empty room, stood a

moment clenching her fists, then she walked with shuffling steps to a barred window opening upon the tiny yard. Blurred visions of Foxy, Minnie, Abie, Bubbele, and Mrs. Ratkin passed through her numbed mind. A shadow of Elias ascended through a rift in the sky. It went up, up, up—and then was closed out of sight. Sarah's eyes dropped upon the offal litter in the yard. She clenched her fists tighter and moved hastily to the middle of the room. Her gray hair, loosely pinned, tumbled over her shoulders. She turned her face upward between lifted shoulders and threw out her hands, palms open, as if challenging the Unknown to explain her fate. A groaning figure with head bowed in hands crouched on the dirty, dust-laden floor.

LXV

Sarah, and not Leopold, succumbed to illness. In less than a month's time she was so reduced that she had to spend many hours on the lounge, but with her usual stoicism she denied the necessity for summoning a doctor, assuring Leopold each day that she would be well by the morrow.

"Don't you think," Leopold suggested once when Sarah looked particularly ill, "that since you are sick we ought to let the children know we are here?" Before putting the question, he had considered long and seriously.

"No, no!" cried Sarah passionately. It had become a mania with her to keep their return a secret from everyone, especially her children. They must not know of her reduced circumstances. And she was too worn to give logical thought to what might be the end of it all.

Leopold went to work daily in a cigarette factory in much the same capacity as Elias, though the shop was spacious and modern. On his return home evenings he would find a sick wife and as sick a supper awaiting him.

And so the days passed, seemingly leading nowhere.

LXVI

Two Sundays went by without a visit from Abraham. Minnie thought he might not be well, but refrained from writing him for fear of appearing indelicate. The next Sunday a full hour went in the vain expectation that each masculine figure on the street would prove to be Abraham.

The next day at lunch Minnie deliberately asked Yetta if she knew whether Abraham was well. Yetta dropped her lids. She was sure he was well; Doctor Flegal, whom she had seen several times, had said nothing of his being ill. Minnie was relieved. She had not noticed that Yetta spoke too eagerly.

The rest of the week Minnie went about wondering why it was that now when she was fitted to be Abraham's helpmate, he should be indifferent. "Fate delights in mean tricks," she said to herself in a dawning perception of life's ironies.

The fourth Sunday her sisters exchanged silent smiles over the persistent figure at the window, and shrugged their shoulders because of Minnie's lack of pride. When a man turns cold, it was their belief, a woman should congeal. Toward evening Minnie retired to her room. When she reappeared, her eyes were red-rimmed. She was lonely, her heart was heavy. She wanted something

to live for, somebody to mean something to her, somebody to mean something to. Life was barren, empty. "Gregory, oh, Gregory!" she cried within herself.

After one more long vigil by the window on the following Sunday, her heart was convulsed with forebodings. "Can it be that Abraham is in love with someone else?"

He had written: "You may steal, kill, make yourself detestable in my eyes, I will love you." She felt a moment's peace.

"Then why has he stayed away so long? He never did it before." A dark shadow was on her heart.

"Wait until you get well and then we will talk the whole thing over," he had said on the New Jersey hill.

"He is honorable; he would not go back on his word."

The next morning she rose in a stupor from a torment of nightmares. On her way to work she decided she would take Yetta into her confidence.

As she entered the office the telephone bell rang. She took the receiver off the hook.

"Is that you, Minnie?" came Yetta's voice.

"Yes."

"Well, I simply couldn't wait till lunch to tell you a perfectly wonderful piece of news."

A dramatic pause, during which Minnie's intuitions leapt to the truth.

Time for dramatic suspense to be up, came the announcement.

"Abraham Ratkin and I are going to be married."

A sickening quiver rent Minnie. She was paralyzed. In a daze, she hung up the receiver and stood stark. Her hand went quickly to her throat, feeling its outline. Then a sort of panting indignation pervaded her. In a

moment others came into the office and she braced herself and set to work. . . . It was impossible to accomplish a thing. "She deceived me, she deliberately falsified!" The inconceivable effrontery thrust itself in the way of every other thought. . . .

Minnie's ashen face was plea sufficient for her employer to let her off early in the morning.

At home the thoughts throbbed on and on, and a flood of driving emotions racked her. She was thrust out, and the stranger Yetta Grubicha occupied her place with Abie of her childhood days! . . . She saw herself making confidences to a trusted friend, then saw the same friend a traitor. When she saw the one she could not believe in the other. She was jerked sickeningly by alternate belief and disbelief. It was a revelation of meanness and ugliness that did not reveal but blinded and stunned and sickened. And that Abraham should have failed to adhere to his promise to talk it all over when she got well, and love her even if she stole, killed or made herself detestable in his eyes seemed incredible. She felt herself in a world of unreal beings.

Finally, in a revulsion from this mood, her mind groped its way upward out of the slime. She felt herself lifted in Gregory's arms to his heaven. She was not meant for Abraham. She belonged to Gregory's memory. It was for her to live a life outside herself. Though she was unfitted for a part in the big things to be done in the world, she could live big in spirit, step aside, as it were, and let him who would rush, hustle, bustle over the ruin of others to their success. She was meant to live within; to dream of what might have been and worship what had been. Sighing, with a dull, corroding ache in her heart, she rose and wrote Yetta asking her not to misconstrue

her odd behavior at the telephone. "I wish you happiness," she ended, "and though for me just now it is as if the light of the world has gone out, I am sure I will soon be myself again."

But she was not convinced of it. Something within was dead—no, dying—and it raised a piercing, pleading cry: "Abraham, oh, Abraham, *now* when I long to make you happy!"

LXVII

Minnie's letter put Yetta, against her practical sense, through a period of pious reflection. She was certain that even though Minnie had "played up," she held a pretty caustic opinion of her in reserve. Yetta would have preferred attack. The tables of baseness, treachery, cruelty, could then have been turned upon Minnie, while Yetta could have lashed herself into a fine frenzy of anger to nullify her sense of guilt. As it was, she had a superstitious dread of punishment in some form or other; she trod timidly as if to hide from the watchful eyes of the Fates.

When Abraham came in the evening, she rose from her seat at the window with a start as if awakened from a trance. She went toward him languidly, kissed him passionately on the lips and let the tears gather in her eyes.

"What's the matter?" Abraham asked at once in concern. She turned her head away, began a sigh and as if becoming conscious of it cut it short. She moved languidly toward the window. "What is it, dear?" he repeated, in alarm, following her. Something must be very wrong, he believed in his sincerity, if Yetta was so dis-

tressed. She sank into her chair and turned her head to the window. He stood beside her while removing his hat and coat.

"I'll take them," she said languidly, holding her hand out gracefully for his garments and half rising in readiness for service.

He held her off with "I'll do it myself," and laid the things down on a chair; then he seated himself beside her, bent forward, took her hand, and insisted, this time imperatively, upon knowing what was the trouble.

Yetta turned liquid eyes upon him pleadingly. He inferred she did not wish to be questioned and so sat silently holding her hand. She turned her eyes away again. With the cunning that in vulgar yet aspiring natures replaces genuineness, she assumed all the outer manifestations of an inward struggle. She sighed and quivered and palpitated.

Abraham's heart was genuinely wrung.

"What is it? Please tell me, I beg you," he pleaded.

She dropped her head on his shoulder. He took her in his arms. She broke into gentle weeping, by degrees working herself up into real unhappiness.

"I am so miserable!"

"Miserable?" Abraham cried. It was a ruthless pluck at his man's pride. He thought somehow he was the cause. Divining his suspicion she hastened to allay it.

"I had a dreadful letter from Minnie."

He bit his lips. The mention of Minnie's name cast a blight. He was irritated. Yetta nestled her head more lovingly on his shoulder. She languished and she sighed according to all the rules of contemporary drama. And the more marked Yetta's distress, the more Abraham was upset and the angrier he grew at Minnie. He sup-

posed her letter had been offensive and abusive. Disgust with the Minnie he had been deceived in mounted by rapid degrees.

"Don't take it so hard," he coaxed, his whole body quivering.

In time Yetta's emotion subsided, and it was possible to hold smooth converse.

Abraham asked to see the letter. Yetta had destroyed it. Just as well, Abraham concluded. He told Yetta she should not reply, nor, for that matter, should either of them have anything more to do with Minnie. With the inexorableness with which a surgeon performs an amputation, they should remove Minnie from their lives so as to leave their matrimonial platform clear of all encumbrances.

"You know best, dear," Yetta acceded, cuddling up to him.

A prayer of gratitude went up from Abraham's heart. This woman that God had given him was so amenable, so gentle, so good.

LXVIII

Though Sarah was merciless with herself in endeavoring to overcome her weakness, her spirit was unable to buoy up her body. Every day it came harder to her to go through with her meager household tasks. Yet she made no moan, bowing her head like a horse in a storm.

Only her mind went on tirelessly.

"Is my life coming to an end? What is life? Who has the say over it? Surely not the individual. Where

does it lead to? Is it meant as a game or a lesson or a joke? . . . I have toiled with my very marrow up a very mountain to be rid of poverty; with my blood I watered the ground for my children to grow in more easily than I, and now, through no neglect of mine or my children's, I am ruthlessly plucked and returned to the rotten soil of poverty to decay. I am no longer fit to make a struggle. Whoever the evil perpetrator of my fate is, he has won. Where is the justice? Whose is the guilt? I am broken, wholly broken. And so is Leopold. And how much more than a hair's breadth divides my children from my very fate!"

Her children lived in her as mere memories. She mourned as though they could never be restored to her. Time and again she worried with a new sort of worry, a worry bereft of all poignancy and yet deep as her being, whether they had been comfortable while she was in South Africa. She had learned from Beckie and Ida that Minnie had come home to live, and her conscience smote her. She scourged herself for having misjudged the girl, and looked back upon her period of violent indignation as though it had been a spell of insanity. She could hardly believe she had ever been capable of it. "She was sick; I was concerned only about myself. I've been a bad mother, a bad mother." She wrung her yellowish hands in abject desolation, and felt herself a stranger to the old Sarah. The new Sarah knew no grudges, no malice. Recollections of the children each in turn as little ones with their individual wiles and pranks would contract her heart with pain. Now Minnie was refusing to go steal a band from Mira; now she was helping to pluck chickens; now she was doing washing, scrubbing floors, tying Bubbele's shoe laces. "She was a golden

child. God grant her better luck than her mother has had," Sarah would moan to herself as, shuddering, she would look about the two grimy rooms that everywhere smelt of decay—of the end of all.

* * * * *

Minnie, for all her resignation and for all that she had written to Yetta, went about with the peculiar feeling that the inevitable would somehow be forestalled. The more she thought of it the more incredible it seemed that Abraham who had loved her so should so unceremoniously have discarded her for one as different from herself as Yetta Grubicha. Every day she expected a letter which would eradicate the whole affair as a misunderstanding. But the letter never came, and Minnie began to feel a peculiar shrinking from life, an unwholesomeness about life, as if it were ill with a malignant disease.

One day coming down the lobby of the office building Minnie saw Yetta and Abraham standing at the entrance door talking. Yetta's eyes met hers. Turning color, Yetta quickly lowered her lids and floundered in the conversation. Abraham glanced into the lobby. His heart leapt at the sight of Minnie. By a gigantic effort, he continued conversation with his bride, whose heart, like his own, he knew, palpitated entirely out of keeping with their cold-blooded resolution to lop this disturber from their lives.

Minnie hesitated for a fraction of a second before passing them, uncertain that she rightly discerned their wish to ignore her. But there was no mistaking their intention. Choked with grief and outrage she fairly stumbled out on to the street. Out of their sight she broke into a run and ran and ran until suddenly she

found herself lunging into someone. The conventional "Beg pardon" was on her lips when she felt a restraining touch on her arm.

It was Leopold Pollack.

LXIX

Leopold was also returning from work and walking hurriedly with lowered head, worried by thoughts of Sarah, whom he had left in the morning feeling particularly sick. He had made up his mind that if on his return he found her no better, he would summon a doctor and notify the children. "Since I am working," he argued with himself, "and, thank God, making enough for the little we need, why should we keep our presence a secret? Nonsense!"

Minnie and Leopold stood a moment speechless.

"Is mama back, too?" she finally asked, her face pallid.

"Yes, dear." There was a catch in Leopold's voice and the tenderness that comes from exhaustion. "She is sick—your mother is——" he ended in a quiver.

A dreadful surmise leapt to Minnie's mind; that her mother might be dying, and in the Helina Heimath. Her throat felt strangled. The words came thickly, with a prodigious effort.

"Where—where is she?"

Sarah had not told Leopold that their living in the Henry Street tenement was a repetition of history, and he could not account for Minnie's stare as he mentioned the street and number.

"Mama back on Henry Street?" Her eyes looked wild. "Take me to her," she added hoarsely.

Sarah was asleep on a broken lounge which Leopold had bought in the second-hand basement furniture shop for ninety-five cents. Her face was yellow and lined.

Minnie and Leopold walked softly over and stood by her side. A mad desire to shout at the Fates, at heaven and God, to spit in the face of all life almost suffocated Minnie.

"She looks worse than when I left her this morning," Leopold whispered.

Minnie turned abruptly away and staggered over to the window.

She was a little girl again with Foxy tugging at her skirts; Abie assailed her with "Fights." Her thumb was in her mouth. From the top-floor window Sarah called "Minnie!" She was back again in the present with a broken heart and silent sobs rending her being.

Sarah stirred on the broken lounge. She opened her eyes and smiled pathetically and apologetically up at Leopold.

"Are you home already?" she asked in a weak voice. At the same instant she recognized Minnie and turning even yellower tried to raise herself.

"I walked right into Minnie, Sarah," Leopold explained hastily.

Minnie rushed to her mother and, raising her to a sitting posture in her arms, dropped down beside her on the edge of the lounge. Sarah, dazed, could not say a word. Leopold turned away. Sarah began to weep. Minnie lowered her head on her mother's shoulder and also wept.

"Minnie, Minnele!" with a shaky hand Sarah stroked the girl's hair.

"Mama, mama dear!"

Suddenly Sarah grew limp in Minnie's arms.

"Mama!" Minnie shrieked.

No answer.

An agonized glance passed between Leopold and Minnie. Leopold dashed out for a doctor.

The room was dark. In a frenzy Minnie stumbled about for the matches. Lighting one, she applied it to the gas jet, but no flame came. The quarter meter had run low late in the day and Sarah had not had the energy to go out and convert loose change into the one coin. Swiftly remembering the character of the tenement's gas service, Minnie dug into her purse, and jumped up on a chair to reach the slot.

"Don't you DARE!" came from Sarah, who had revived and whose eyes had been following her daughter.

Minnie's hand jerked and the coin fell to the floor. She flew to Sarah and sank down on her knees beside her.

"Mama, mama dear."

Sarah, exhausted, sank deeper into the lounge.

Minnie stroked her hair. Regretting her impulsive show of indignation, Sarah took the girl's dank hand in hers and fumbled with it clumsily.

"No, no!" she muttered and paused. "No, it's not for *you* to give me." She paused again. "I was a bad mother to you." She seemed to be speaking to herself. She left off and turned her head to the wall and dropped Minnie's hand. In a moment she felt again for the hand; she tightened and loosened her hold spasmodically. In a voice not like her own, in a husky, low voice, with a

quaver as from old age, she brought out: "You have more character in one of your little fingers than——"

Leopold and the doctor came in.

LXX

The three girls sat up until midnight discussing their mother and Leopold.

"They certainly should not have squandered all that money at their time of life. It took a fortune to go to South Africa," quoth Ida.

"But I think it was because they were so afraid of growing dependent," said Minnie.

"And what about *now*?" demanded Ida, impatient of Minnie's reasoning.

"They didn't foresee this."

"Oh, stop arguing," broke in Beckie. "What difference does it make how it happened? Mama's sick, and we ought to make her come home. The idea of going to Henry Street to live!"

All out of patience, Ida raised her voice. "But she won't *come* home."

Minnie had coaxed Sarah and Leopold to return with her that very night. Leopold, for Sarah's sake, was ready to do so. Sarah, however, persistently declared that now that the doctor had seen her and prescribed she would soon be well and it would be time enough then to make plans.

Ida resented this sudden disturbance of her peace. Now that she might have used her earnings wholly for herself and breathed freely after the many years of work and responsibility, *this* had to come! She sulked within herself that forever since childhood it had been necessary

to make one sacrifice or another for this one or that one of the family. During the summer, before Minnie had come home, Beckie had lost her position, and she had wanted Ida to forego her vacation so as to reduce her own living expenses, because if Ida went away, Ida's weekly contribution would not be forthcoming. "As if," Ida had thought petulantly, "one is not entitled to live for oneself! . . ." Yet she was concerned about her mother. The great nuisance, however, lay in the fact that concern was not sufficient.

"I suppose if she won't come home, we'll each have to chip in something every week until she gets better." Ida sighed resignedly.

Looking into space, Minnie said: "I'm afraid she won't take money and she won't come home either." She had the gas meter incident in mind.

Minnie's notions were too much for Ida. "So *what* will she do?" she exploded, reddening to her temples.

Minnie shrugged her shoulders.

* * * * *

When the three girls reached the Henry Street rooms in the morning, they found Leopold at home ministering to Sarah, in the hope that if he gave himself up to her for the full day and carried out the doctor's orders punctiliously, an immediate cure might be effected.

Warmer than her greeting of the two people was Ida's show of contempt for the freakishness which had taken them again to the pesty East Side. "Such an idea!" she burst out immediately. She might have restrained herself if Sarah had made the miserable picture that Minnie had prepared her for. But Sarah, reacting to her pleasure in Leopold's presence and excited by the children's appearance, was flushed and smiling and looked

rather well. She cowered imperceptibly at Ida's harsh words. With the supersensitiveness of the invalid, her heart began to pound and her temples to throb. With a suppressed gasp, she begged Ida: "Childie, be friendly to your mother," and a sob escaped her. Ida was silenced by a warning look from the other three.

To divert Sarah's attention, Leopold launched upon their South African experiences. While he spoke, Ida's mind was torn between pity and defiance. "I certainly won't mention coming home to them now. As if I didn't mean what I said for their own good! When they have a real home to go to, they turn to this rotten hole! Now they can come if they want to, and if they don't is *nisht gefiddelt* so far as I'm concerned."

When Leopold had finished, Ida rose to go. "I'm an hour late already for work," she said, seeing her mother's disappointment.

The three girls exchanged looks. Ida's said: "I won't." Beckie's said to Minnie: "You do." Minnie's said: "All right." She walked to her mother and leaning over she said gently: "Ma, we'll get a carriage and take you home. You can't stay here. Please, ma."

Sarah flushed. She was annoyed at the tumultuous beating of her own heart. She waved her hand deprecatingly. "I'll be well soon and make money and furnish a home and then invite *you* to *my* home." It was obvious that there was no use arguing with her. She was a rock of determination.

Ida turned away disgusted. Beckie felt tearful. Minnie, too, felt tearful. Leopold hung his head.

When Ida was going out, Sarah begged the other two not to let themselves be detained either: they might come again in the evening if they cared to; she would be glad

to see them. When Minnie and Beckie kissed her, she wiped away tears from her eyes. Ida, touched, returned from the door and also kissed her mother.

An hour later Sarah lapsed into unconsciousness. Leopold rushed out to summon the doctor. Soon afterward Sarah was no more.

LXXI

Bad news travels fast and far.

Almost simultaneously there flocked to the house of death all the relatives Sarah had ever had in days happy and unhappy. And Mira Cohen, too, proprietress of the Cohen Millinery Bargain House, her hair Marcel-waved, bustled in breathless with excitement. She wrung her hands. She charged Leopold Pollack:

"Why, *why* didn't you let me know? Woe is me, why didn't you let some of us know? Wouldn't I have *helped* you? Why are we *human* beings if not to help one another?"

Was it sincere, Minnie wondered, or was it hypocrisy, or the dictation of imbecile minds and shallow hearts? . . . What had Ida's wailing and moaning in common with her hard-hearted attitude before Sarah's death? Minnie looked at her, recalling, with the utter amazement she had felt at the time, the scene when Ida had learned of her mother's death. This had been in the vestibule of the Henry Street tenement; Ida had run out on the street as in a fit of madness; had flung away her purse, and torn her hat from her head, crying: "Mama, oh, *my* mama!"

"Ida, Ida, dear, control yourself," Minnie had begged.

"Oh, don't bother me. Your fancy words make me

sick. *I* want to cry for *my* mother. If you don't want to cry for *yours*, don't!"

Minnie stared at the mourners and shrugged in the utter incomprehension with which duplicity inspires the straightforward. Frequently her eyes traveled to where her mother lay, the humble coffin covered with a black cloth, the lighted candles at the head.

"What an end! What an end!" she mourned, feeling that something within her had also died.

LXXII

For several months Minnie and Beckie had their time taken up by Ida, who succumbed to a nervous breakdown. Minnie took her to the hill in New Jersey where she had recuperated from this same of the many of her past blessings. Though Minnie pointed to herself as a living example of the disease overcome, Ida was certain that in her case there would be no cure. Minnie might have had a nervous breakdown, but it had not been like hers. In time she recovered and went back to work.

Then came some joy. Beckie, sweet and pretty, was wooed, was married, and went to another city to live.

Ida and Minnie decided to go their separate ways, one of their reasons being that it was impossible for the two of them alone to maintain the home. Ida took a room at the Young Ladies' Lodge. Minnie, averse to a repetition of any past experiences, chose a home from out of the newspaper columns of "Boarders Wanted."

LXXIII

The time was about eight o'clock in the evening, the place was the skylight room of a first-class boarding-

house kept by a refined Southern lady in reduced circumstances who condescended to take in a few paying guests. Minnie Mendel was sitting perched on the top rung of a slim ladder that led up to a glass dome opening on the roof. Smoke spouting up hurriedly from a nearby chimney as if anxious to escape confinement tumbled in a mass mingling with the grayness of the night.

"It's funny to have to climb a ladder for a whiff of air—a funny place to live in, a skylight room—a funny life," Minnie mused, an odd mixture of smile and sigh playing in her heart.

The time had passed quietly. Her poignant grief at her mother's death had settled into an even sorrow. And Abraham's marriage had sunk below a misty horizon. Now there was just loneliness. And the world seemed to hold no balm for all the bruises of the past. Life became again a round of work, eat, sleep, with here and there a snatch of gladness, in the form of a cheerful letter from Beckie, a talk with a friend, a bit of music, a play. But in the main it was empty, for the spirit craved big things and was fettered by lack of training and opportunity. Bitterness stirred in her soul as she sat cogitative on the ladder. She tried to reason it away by telling herself she was an infinitesimal part of a gigantic whole. "But then I am a part," she argued on the side of bitterness. "Without me there is no whole. No human being must be disregarded as if he were a mistake. . . ." She looked up and watched the gray clouds sail by. Slowly forward they were moving, sure as could be—mama, papa, Foxy—Minnie wiped tears from her eyes. "It's been a terrific struggle. Mama climbed about as high as this ladder and they would not even let her stay there." In the wake of her grief over

her mother swept a horrible fear. "I am afraid of life, I'm not feeling a bit well. My heart pounds—pounds—pounds all the time. I don't sleep—I don't feel well. If I break down, then what?" She shuddered. That way lurked horror. Up in the clouds a rift was made; two brown eyes looked into hers. "Slick—slick—oh, yes, I should have been slick. I am afraid of life, of its terribly sharp edges. I should have married money and made the edges dull for myself. There was Morris Caplan—John Maloney. All the girls who are afraid of the sharp edges do it; you see them on Seventh Avenue, on Broadway, on Fifth Avenue. They are afraid of the sharp edges. I am just as afraid, only I am not as slick. What if the wedding march *does* toll the knell of a soul? To live with a soul in a skylight room—lovely quarters for a soul—a place to thrive in surely." She wiped away tears. From somewhere in her being rose the thought: "A better way for all maybe has miscarried: who knows, perhaps it will be restored to us some day by the Messiah—papa's Messiah." She smiled and wiped tears away, and then descended from the ladder because her back ached.

The dismalness of the tiny room lit by a puny gas jet was too well attuned to her melancholy; she put on her hat and went out.

She walked slowly toward Fifth Avenue, which was not far from her boarding-house. At one corner the traffic was having the right-of-way. She waited.

A fat gentleman had walked as fast as he could behind her. When she stopped he had a chance to make sure of the correctness of his guess.

"Well, Miss Mendel! I thought to myself 'that's she,' but I wasn't sure." Mr. Maloney seemed to have fed

well during the years; his girth was monumental, the tip of his nose red and shiny, his eyes murky, his lids puffy, and his cheeks bloated. . . All of which made no difference to Minnie. . . His voice was like an echo of the past that had held laughter and fun-making.

"Mr. Maloney!"

She shook his hand warmly. He pressed so hard that she cried out. An old trick of his, and an old way of hers. "Well, I see yer after objecting to the same things yet." It was on the tip of Mr. Maloney's Irish tongue to ask whether she also still objected to "fellers" like him.

"Are ye after losing anybody?" he asked instead. She was dressed in black.

"Yes, I've lost my mother." She dropped her eyes. "But I've been out of mourning a long time." How could she tell Mr. Maloney that she could not live in a cheap boarding-house with its smells and noises and atrocious food and boresome company, and that the skylight room of a first-class house took so much of her salary that no margin was left for clothes; and though she hated the sight of black she brushed and furbished up her garments to last an eternity? The consciousness, however, that in spite of her old mourning she did not look dowdy helped her meet Mr. Maloney's eyes squarely.

"That's too bad," he said earnestly and took note that she looked pinched and that lines of age were visible around her nostrils and the corners of her mouth, and she was not so pretty any more. The mirthful twinkle in her great gray eyes had been much more becoming than this wise stare. He gave a little cluck and tried to suppress a bit of satisfaction that she was apparently not prosperous.

"Married?" he asked.

"No."

Another triumph.

"Are you?"

His "no" cast a ray of gladness on Minnie's heart. She was ashamed of it.

"Are ye bound for any place in particular?"

"No, I live near here and am just out for a walk."

"How would ye like to take in a movie? I'm free, too. Let's go down to Forty-sec—— Here——there——" He hailed a taxi and hustled Minnie in before she had time to accept or reject his invitation. It was his purpose in thus hailing the taxi to remind Minnie of the opportunity for well-being she had spurned. His object lesson was successful. She might now, it crossed her mind, be rolling in padded cars along Fifth Avenue. She felt a vague regret coupled with a bitterness as if life were a cruel schoolmaster who knew no bounds in its chastisement for disobedience.

"How's that feller, that high-brow feller of yers?" he asked when they were settled in the car.

"Mr. Ratkin? Oh, he's married." Flushing, she tried to evade his eyes.

What was the matter with the girl? She didn't seem able to smile. Been having a hell of a time of it—anybody could see that. Mr. Maloney could somehow not feel sorry.

"Where you working?"

"In a book house."

"Making lots of money?"

She smiled a wistful, tired smile that went straight to Mr. Maloney's heart through the layers of his bulging flesh, for she looked pretty again at that moment.

He himself had been lonely. There had been no one

to make use of all the thousands piling up in his name. And even a suite of rooms in a fine family hotel palls on one's spirits. The sufferings of the heart do not differ much, no matter in what heart they are lodged.

"How comes it yer not married? Ye were so popular like—sort——"

"How comes it *you're* not?" She interrupted him for refuge from her embarrassment. She smiled and flushed. The thought that she was already an old maid, that the time had come when people regarded her as an old maid, as an unattractive, undesirable female, flung through her mind and stung her to the quick. She felt ashamed as if she were guilty of defilement. Her soul reaching out like the drowning man for the straw caught on to a ray of hope—that Mr. Maloney might ask her to marry him. "How glad I would be!" her heart cried; and while the finer instinct that in previous years had told her that love was the basis of marriage raised its voice even now, her instinct for life submerged it. "Why not? *Everybody* does it!" She grew angry with herself somehow for standing in her own way.

As if Mr. Maloney divined her thoughts, he laid his hand on hers. Her heart began to beat fast. Though the contact was distasteful, she allowed his hand to rest there. "I'm NOT going to be a freak any longer. I'm going to be slick. They *all* do it—slick—Gregory——" Her heart laughed a sardonic laugh as she smiled encouragement upon Mr. Maloney.

Four hours later they were seated in a private dining-room of a hotel. They had been to a motion-picture theater. He had held her hand all through the performance. Aha, she was attainable, was the conclusion John Maloney had come to after very little thinking. Her price had

come down. He was a winner. . . . But he was an old bachelor, with idiosyncrasies, fixed habits, hard to get along with, and he really didn't care to marry. Maybe she'd meet him half way. If she had come as far as she had, she would come farther. There was every evidence.

He hesitated some time, however, before he gathered the courage to bend over to her side of the table and kiss her. Her soul shrank; she gritted her teeth. From the tablecloth Gregory's brown eyes looked "slick" at her.

"Now why can't ye"—Mr. Maloney coughed—"have a nice, fine little apartment—a swell place of your own; sport sealskin and grand clothes——" He bobbed his head—"I'm a rich feller——" He dug one hand in his pocket while he wobbled in his chair.

Her heart thundered in her ears.

"I'm too old to marry—don't ye know—too—too"—he brushed the air away with his hand—"set in my ways." He spread his fat knees farther apart. "But yer a sensible girl now. I'll do right by ye——" He coughed.

She stared at him. What could he mean?

"There ain't much to this marriage business anyway nowadays. I'll give you a grand salary—income—sort of—and treat you square——" He bent over, his breath coming in gusts like a locomotive starting off. A crumb of bread was lodged on his lower lip, and his face looked terribly bloated.

Minnie was still not sure she understood, yet she felt alarmed. The male in Mr. Maloney rose in a great gust of resolution. *This* time she would not make sport of him. He raised his voice to a more compelling pitch.

"That decency business—rot——" he brought out like a thick sneeze—— "Look at ye——" He pointed at her

with his pudgy hand; "years flying—opportunities—betcher ye haven't had a proposal of marriage in a blue moon. If a feller like me offers ye money—comfort——"

Was he making an indecent proposal? He leaned closer to her; she drew away; he grew very red in the face and breathed very hard while he looked at her with bulging eyes. . . . She felt certain now. A wave of humiliation swept upon her. It was as if someone had slammed a door in her face.

"Come on now——" said Mr. Maloney, his fat chest heaving.

She jumped up and without a word left him alone in the room.

LXXIV

The lights in the Helina Heimath were turned off at nine o'clock, and no exception was made when it welcomed back old guests.

The ward was dark and quiet except for an occasional cough, an occasional groan and an occasional call for the attendant, who called back "s-sh" or "shut-up" according to her mood of the moment.

Though she was tired, sleep would not come to Minnie. She tossed from side to side. Then, bethinking herself that her restlessness must disturb her neighbor, she lay still, staring out of the window. "This is the 'perfectly lovely' view again!" She smiled wistfully. "It seems dark and dismal to me. I guess much depends upon the *point* of view." She gave a fatalistic shrug, shifted her position and stared and stared out upon the view, which in the night was merged into one blot of

black. What a somersault her life had taken! In ruins lay all her hopes—a sorry mess. She was once more a bit of scum of the earth in a Human Job-Lot House. Like her mother she had made the ascent and the descent. . . . Why? Why? The question tossed in her head desperately. But there seemed to be no one to whom to put it. Her heart wound itself into a tight knot, her lips began to feel drawn as with acid. A sense of outrage welled up from the nethermost of her being. The world had it so slickly arranged that there was no one to ask, no one to challenge, no one to blame. Her eyes wandered out into the corridor and then into the vast ward opposite where lay thirty other human beings cheated and mangled like herself. Above them were more, below them were more; to the right and to the left were more. There were more, more, more—— All over the *world* there were humans, cheated, mangled, like these, like herself. Her chest heaved; her eyes blazed; her heart vacillated between anguish and disgust. “The host who make their march triumphant, trampling *us* down on their way, do so because *we let them*—because we let them. We let them because we have not enough spirit to rebel effectively. Poverty is a sin—a vice—a wrong—a shame—a disgrace to *all* of us called civilized. The conditions that make it possible must be hewn down and swept away. The world must be exterminated or readjusted.”

* * * * *

The morning after Minnie's meeting with John Maloney the maid of the boarding-house had found her ill in bed, and the landlady who had had troublesome experiences with inmates of the skylight room when she had been dilatory in summoning a doctor, now sent for one

post-haste. The physician, who saw that proper care was not to be had here, despatched Minnie to a hospital where her various symptoms were grouped under the dignified designation "endocarditis." After a time, according to the rule of the institution, she was to be transferred to a place where patients were kept for protracted periods. When the ward physician came to tell her she was to be removed to the Helina Heimath and her eyes looked amazement and a lividness spread over her face, little did he suspect that his whisking her under the chin and calling her a "scared little girl" and assuring her she would be "all right" in the Helina Heimath was like holding up a stick to stay a tornado. How could he possibly have suspected when a dignified "all right" said nothing of a convulsed heart? Nor had he looked back and seen her bury her head in her pillow.

"The Helina Heimath! The Helina Heimath!"

The cry had broken upon unattending ears.

LXXV

A group of young inmates of the Helina Heimath, gathered in the corridor on wheel-chairs, were singing lustily: "Those Bells Are Ringing for Me and Mah Girl."

Minnie was in her room alone, staring, thinking. It was three months since she had come to the Heimath. She was over the acute stage of her illness and could be up and about. Much to the chagrin of the good-hearted authorities, however, she was not "lively." For instance, one never found her among those singing in the corridors, and one never found her participating in the institution's jollifications, its entertainments, its concerts,

its parties—magnanimous treats of the Ladies' Aid Society, or parties arranged to punctuate philanthropically the birth or wedding of some interested benefactor of the Heimath. She was glum, mum, exclusive. She had won the title "pessimist" from the authorities. Whether they whisked her under the chin, or severely called her to task, "pessimist" was always prefixed; and her pessimism, they had it, was centered upon her physical condition; she delved into minute crevices of her aches and pains, emerged with her own gloomy diagnosis, and then brooded, brooded, seeing ahead more disease, worse disease, the dismal, dark grave. . . . And Minnie, just as she had known when she was a child that few could understand the subtle reasoning by which she drew the, to her, justifiable conclusion that she was an orphan, so she now knew that to take these healthy, wholesome beings, beings whom life had met half way with its bounty, into the secret chambers of her heart and soul would be to take them into a country in which they would not know their way, which they would declare unfertile for good. If she told them what was in her heart, a suffering in which personal tragedy and the tragedy of mankind were blended, they would hear a voice out of tune; for they were living in an harmonious world; *they* had not been mauled and smashed; their hearts were whole, not broken into bits, each of which ached in its own corner for self as part of *all* tragedy. They could not understand the maternal tremulousness with which she watched and waited for the promised offspring of the World War—Democracy; how hungrily her eyes devoured the daily reports; how stirred to its root her soul was each midnight by the infinitely sorrowful notes of Taps, which

from a distant cantonment were wafted across the dark expanse into her open window.

* * * * *

It was the day of a party; one of the daughters of a Lady of the Aid Society was marrying. The inmates of the Heimath should share in the joy. Minnie's disinclination to participate was ruled down by the ward physician. She was compelled to go.

Long, narrow tables, which reminded one of loaves of stale French bread, were subdivided into tiny spaces upon each of which was placed a heavy crockery mug filled with mulatto-colored coffee; alongside the mug on the oilcloth covering rested a piece of sponge cake. That was the treat. When it was devoured, the chic ladies encouraged singing, and soon male and female voices broke out into "Johnny Get Your Gun, Get Your Gun, Get Your Gun."

Minnie sat listlessly back in her chair. The gathering receded. She felt herself in a mist. "These poor ghosts," she wondered as she gazed upon the blurred, crippled images, "do they realize the night of their existence?" Her eyes lighted unexpectedly upon the exquisite real lace collar of a lady flitting to and fro. "Does she ever stop to think, I wonder, what tragedies may be interwoven in the pattern of that collar? . . . No, she doesn't. If she did she would not take this party so seriously. She would see that it sets no evil right. These women have not their blinds completely down on the sufferings of the world; they are better, much better than many others. But for all their goodnesses how small is their vision! They think philanthropy takes the world a step forward; they feel sorry for *us* but they do not know the weal and the woe of mankind." She had a curious second of de-

tachment, during which she was in luxurious quarters with Mr. Maloney, and then clear vision again. Beside her stood a lady jeweled, overdressed, with a fleshy face. She patted Minnie on the head.

"Sighing again? Thinking again? Why don't you sing—sing with the others? Bad girl——"

"Bad girl—nice girl in the Helina Heimath——" ran through Minnie's mind.

"Emma! Emma!" called this lady to another.

A woman dressed in clothes of tempered elegance, beautiful and young, gazed round the room. Her eyes lighted up with a smile of recognition. She made her way between the tables to the lady at Minnie's side.

"Tell me," the lady, again patting Minnie's head, said to the other, "what shall we do with this girl? She mopes and mopes. Never livens up. Eh?" she added caressingly, looking down into Minnie's upturned eyes.

Minnie flushed with embarrassment and resentment. "Shut up!" ran through her mind. She said nothing.

"The other day," the lady continued, "I passed her room; there she was sitting by the window all hunched up——" She spoke slowly, with a rhythm, as if she were intoning a lullaby.

"Mind your business!" rushed through Minnie's mind, while her heart was suffocated by distaste.

"Reading 'Looking Backward——'"

"Aha, instead of being out in the sunshine and playing with the other young ones," knowingly chimed in the other, in a lovely, soft voice. She smacked her lips, however, and drew her face—so that she looked slick——

A convulsive feeling of rebelliousness seemed to wrest Minnie's soul from its lodging.

"My redeemers! my mentors! Suppose I should tell

them that I don't like the lines of their clothes, that they vulgarly accentuate their figures, they would tell me I'm cheeky. They are ladies—I'm a girl in the Heimath——"

"Oh, Emma," called a third.

The two turned abruptly away. They would not have hurt Minnie for the world. But she was left behind feeling small, as insignificant as a louse in shaggy wool. She grew hot and trembly. She hated life.

When the summons for dismissal came a moment later, she jumped up eagerly. In the way of her hasty exit were wheel-chairs—wheel-chairs—wheel-chairs—with lame, blind, diseased.

How she loathed it all! If she could have hurled these people aside—destroyed—exterminated them in one blow, she would have done so. "Fools—damn fools!" slapped against her brain. "Grateful and ingratiating—hood-winked by a bit here and a snip there."

She hurried out and, disregarding of the sick, pounding heart, rushed to her room, taken by a burning resolution. If they would not rebel, she would for herself *and* them. She would rebel for all the world's poor—she would be poor no longer—she would refuse docilely to swell the number of the world's idiots—the world's fools——

In her room she flung the drawer of her tiny table open and took out pen, ink and paper.

"Dear Mr. Maloney," she wrote, "I have been sick and in the Helina Heimath for six months. I am much better now and ready to do as you asked me to if you will make me independent."

With resolute steps she retraced the corridor to the post-box. Her cheeks burned, her eyes, rooted to the floor, were glassy like the bottoms of bottles.

"Mees Mendel!" reached her as through a fog.

Morris Caplan was on his way to Amelia Rubin, dying of cancer, in another ward.

LXXVI

One year later Mrs. Ratkin's eye fell upon a newspaper announcement of the marriage of Mildred Mendel to Morris Caplan. She could have been knocked over with a straw.

Truth to tell, Mildred Mendel had been much on Mrs. Ratkin's mind, especially since the second choice of her very estimable son appealed to her heart even less than his first choice. For one thing Yetta Grubicha was not a bit better-looking, in fact not as good looking as Mildred Mendel; nor had she greater wealth to boast of, nor did she hail from better stock. If no arrest of the father had occurred, there was a brother, a young boy to be sure, serving a term in a penitentiary. Young or old, it was no point for boasting. To boot, the Grubichas were of Galician stock! Of the Mendels it could at least be said that they were German——

During Abraham's and Yetta's short engagement Mrs. Ratkin, as she observed what seemed to her their obvious incompatibility, had often sighed and shed tears, but this time she had resolved not to interfere. She had suffered too keenly when Abraham was going through the pangs of Minnie's rejection to be a voluntary agent of another such experience for him.

When Mrs. Ratkin had heard of Sarah's death, then of Minnie's illness, and later of Leopold Pollack's death a few months after Sarah's, she had been thrown into a state of great awe. A superstitious fear overwhelmed her that the two dead ones would intercede with the

Deity to visit disaster upon her progeny. Her daughters would remain old maids, Yetta Grubicha would turn out to be a demon in disguise, she herself would become lame, blind, dumb! How Mrs. Ratkin suffered in the anticipation of this vengeance! Time and again she prayed for forgiveness from the harmless Sarah, and begged God's blessings upon the poor orphan Minnie, whose qualities of refinement, goodness, low-voicedness and especially orphanhood she called earnestly to the good God's attention.

In a great heat of excitement she cut out the announcement from the newspaper and, donning her street clothes, made straight for the home of her children. She arrived hot, panting and puffing. Scarcely was the greeting over, when she rummaged in the bosom of her dress and produced the clipping.

"LOOK!" she cried to her son.

Mrs. Ratkin seated herself beside Yetta, who was holding a five-months'-old daughter on her lap. Yetta looked up at Mrs. Ratkin's raised hand and then at the tiny slip and next at Abraham who stood some distance away. "Look at mother's piece of paper, dear," Yetta said to him. Abraham stepped over to his mother and, with a smile anticipatory of some joke, took the clipping from her hand. There was a moment's silence. The smile on Abraham's face faded. He held the clipping down for Yetta to read. Mrs. Ratkin transferred her interested gaze from Abraham to Yetta. A tiny smile now played about Yetta's lips. After reading the announcement, she handed it back to Mrs. Ratkin, and looked up at Abraham. A glance that did not lend itself to Mrs. Ratkin's interpretation passed between the two. Yetta fingered the lace yoke of her baby's dress. In a low voice she

said, assuming that manner of hesitancy which was to distinguish her remark from unadulterated petty criticism:

"Isn't he the fellow she used to call 'kike'?"

A glance of subtle understanding passed between husband and wife, and they leaned closer to each other. Abraham stroked Yetta's kinky hair, while a peaceful feeling of gratitude pervaded his heart for the woman God had given him.

From their attitude Mrs. Ratkin could not decide what manner of comment was expected of her. On an impulse and as a way out, she grabbed up the granddaughter from Yetta's lap and, dancing her in the air, burst into song. "Ei, tiddle, liddle, liddle; ei, tiddle, liddle, um, tum."

Yetta clapped her hands. Abraham smiled.

THE END

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